DOCTORAL THESIS

Re-imagining the MGM musical:
authorship and adaptation in film and stage musicals

James, Nathan

Award date:
2017

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

Re-imagining the MGM Musical: Authorship and Adaptation in Film and Stage Musicals

by

Nathan James MA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

Department of Dance
University of Roehampton
2017

Abstract

Choreographers have often been one of the silent voices during the golden age of film musicals due to a lack of union recognition and the denial of an Academy Award since 1937. This thesis seeks to examine the role of the choreographer in MGM musicals between 1929 and 1957 when the studio system collapsed. Underpinning the research is an investigation of authorship within the work of choreographers and film stars who danced and contributed to their own dance performances on screen. Utilising the auteur theory, the first part of this research examines to what extent the choreographer and dancer can be considered an author of their own work. During the latter part of the 20th century, the auteur lens has been relocated to other roles, such as directors and producers, rather than the traditional screenwriters. Despite an immense contribution to the film musicals produced in the golden age, dancers and choreographers have not been fully included in these later examinations. The collaborative nature of working in film musicals is complex and this research seeks to assert authorial credit to choreographers and dancers, who provided a rich legacy of work on screen, through the use of detailed dance analysis and archival research.

The second part of this thesis advances the investigation to screen-to-stage adaptations, a growing genre of musical theatre in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Several film musicals have been adapted to stage and the analysis in this thesis considers the adaptation process, whilst continuing to navigate through the complex web of determining authorship when switching between film and theatre mediums. The two case studies, *42nd Street* (1980) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1985), provide clear examples of the problematic issue of adapting between performance modes and how choreographers and directors circumvent between recapturing the past and making original contributions. This thesis seeks to establish the choreographer's authorial voice and widen the contribution to dance studies examining the development of dance in film musicals.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I want to thank my supervisors Dr. Stacey Prickett and Dr. Helena Hammond who have supported and nurtured me through this process. Their constant advice, suggestions and understanding of my schedule has been of immense help throughout.

My employers, the Urdang Academy, have been extremely supportive and allowed me to negotiate my duties as a department head with that of the need to study and write this thesis. My love of dance was encouraged as a child by Audree Henwood for which I am thankful. I am indebted to Christina Ballard and Tereza Theodoulou, for not only nurturing my teaching skills, but always inspiring me to be a better version of myself, their pearls of wisdom are always in my ears. Thanks go to Sandra Garcia-Meyers and Ned Cormstock at the University of Southern California, and Jenny Romero at the Margaret Herrick Library who have gone out of their way to support this project.. George Feltenstein, Senior Vice President at Warner Brothers Home Video, directed me to the archival interviews from the TCM project at the Mary Pickford Research Center and the University of Georgia. Staff at Boston University, the New York Public Library of Performing Arts, and the Library of Congress in Washington all welcomed me and provided me with assistance when needed. I am indebted to Larry Billman, whose energy and enthusiasm for the project helped connect me to many of the interviewees including: Sylvia Lewis, Fred Curt and Barrie Chase. Kerry Kelly Novick, Randy Skinner, Karin Baker, Lee Roy Reams, Miriam Nelson, Rusty Frank, Steven Suskin, Ray Hesselink, Debbi Dee also gave their time and enthusiasm to the project for which I am forever grateful. Sadly, Larry and Fred died at the start of 2017 and were not able to see the finished project that they were so enthusiastic about. I dedicate this thesis to their memory, Larry for continuing to honour the legacy of dance on film and to Fred who can be seen dancing in many film musicals of the 1950s and 1960s.

Lastly, I thank my mother Andrea Wallace, who introduced me to musical theatre and who is unfailing in her support and help to both the project and my general wellbeing during this process. She offered an ear when needed, read copious pages and drafts, and gave helpful advice whenever it was needed.

Key to Abbreviations

AFI	American Film Institute
DGA	Directors Guild of America
LOC	Library of Congress
MHL	Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn Mayer
NYPL	New York Public Library
USC	University of Southern California, Los Angeles

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Introduction

My love affair with dance and musicals began as a three-year-old. Growing up during a time when it was not commonplace to own a VHS player, spending days at my childminders opened a whole new world once I discovered the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). From that point onwards I lived for the moments when I was transported to a technicolour fantasy world. In 1987 my fate was sealed, I was taken to see *42nd Street* in London and I made the choice that I would be a dancer. Embarking on a career as a professional dancer I am lucky to have travelled the world, and it came full circle when I appeared in the German production of *42nd Street* in 2004, based on the 2001 Broadway revival. Upon making the transition to teaching, I have always imparted my love for the past to students to keep the history and tradition of dance alive. Here, thirty years later, this PhD thesis acts as a long overdue thank you to all the many dancers who gave me so much inspiration.

The original intention of this research could have fulfilled three PhD theses, and so presented here is a more streamlined version of that original plan. It is apparent early on in the research process that choreographers are overlooked in the film industry due to the lack of industry and union recognition. The focus on dance in film began to align itself with the concept of authorship and stylistic traits that reoccur throughout a body of work. Establishing the auteur in film musicals is a complex issue due to the collaborative nature of creating films. However, if choreographers have a personal style that permeates through the traditional narrative structure and becomes a device in which to further the plot, characters or relationships, then there is a significant rationale for the choreographer to be considered as an author regarding their creative contribution.

The work of the choreographer in the musical, both film and stage, seems ripe for critical analysis of the authorial mode as the dance and movement have a significant contribution to the style or mise en scène. The auteur theory suggests that the recognition of recurring visual traits, within

the body of a film director's work, could quantify the director, in place of the screenwriters, as the author of the film. Directors whose visual styles have been widely acknowledged include both Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock (Wollen, 2013: 210), yet directors of the musical film, other than those of Vincente Minnelli, have widely been ignored. Musical films are collaborative by nature, and the director would typically work on the dramatic scenes, while the choreographer would create and stage the dance numbers. There is evidence, throughout the body of work of several choreographers that, through the use of certain devices/techniques/stylistic qualities, recognisable motifs emerge within their work. Musical films also rely on the performers talents, and the combination of both choreographic and performance styles creates a complex convergence of ideas. Performers such as Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly, were actively known for their choreographic contributions, but when the performance and choreographic style is associated intrinsically with a specific performer, who is the author? The star or the choreographer? Veering the lens away from the director, the thesis examines the role of both choreographer and star as the author. Given the interdisciplinary nature of creating musical and theatre productions, this study questions how the concept of auteur theory is applied to musical works. This thesis will investigate the following research questions:

1. How strong is the authorial voice of the choreographer?
2. To what extent does the personal performance style of a dancer influence that of the choreographer?
3. What contribution to dance has the musical film genre made?

Historically, the Academy Awards bestowed three honours during 1935 and 1937 for Dance Direction and then ceased offering the category to voters (oscars.org). Similarly, there was no established union for the choreographer; only directors had this privilege. It makes one wonder if the lack of acknowledgement for achievements in dance on screen has hampered its significance and downgraded the status of dance, and choreographic contribution, that is so

associated with the visual images projected on the cinema screen. Due to the lack of an award category, the Oscars have bestowed Honorary awards since its inaugural year in 1929. The Academy honoured Astaire in 1949, Kelly in 1951, Michael Kidd in 1997, and Stanley Donen in 1998 (www.oscars.org). Although Astaire and Kelly were honoured during the most productive part of their careers, it took 40 years before others were recognised. Broadway choreographers Jerome Robbins and Onna White received honorary awards for their film choreography in 1961 and 1968 respectively, despite only working on a single film musical. This represents an undermining of the previous 30 years of choreography created for the screen. Inter-office memos from MGM reveal the tension and studio politics that disallowed any form of title that suggested directorial efforts. MGM legal executive Ray Monta contacted producer Arthur Freed with concerns about the wording of the title card for choreographer Robert Alton. His memo reminds the producer of the contentious relationship with the Screen Director's Guild, and that any use of the word 'director' violates their agreements with the union. A post-script on the memo offers:

> We have in the past requested a waiver from the Screen Directors' Guild in similar situations, such as for the instance in connection with the credit to Hermes Pan for "Excuse my Dust", but we have been most emphatically turned down by the Guild.
>
> (Monta, 1951)[1]

At no point has there been evidence to suggest studio executives agreed with the union stipulations, yet there seems to have been no motion to reinstate the Academy Award or forge union protection for choreographers. Archival research has uncovered several inter-office communications that emphasise the lack of recognition for the choreographer and demonstrate the political wrangling of the Hollywood studio system. The archival research undertaken for this research has continued to emphasise the lack of recognition that choreographer's received in

[1] *The Belle of New York* Production Files, Box 5, Folder 1, Arthur Freed Collection, USC

terms of their contributions to dance on screen.

The Golden Age of Hollywood, also referred to as Classical Hollywood by film scholar David Bordwell (1985: 2), broadly considers the filmic output of the major Hollywood studios from the early twentieth century to the end of the studio system, when film companies no longer monopolised the distribution of their films across America. The period of study considered in this thesis ranges from 1929, with the premiere of the first all-talking musical *The Broadway Melody,* to 1957 when both film production modes changed and public interest in musical films was declining. The golden era of MGM will always be associated with the production of musical films as, more than any other studio, it prided and revered itself on the development of the genre. In 1998 the American Film Institute (AFI) invited 1500 members of the film industry to vote on the 100 greatest American films. Within the top ten of the AFI list, two MGM musicals feature; *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) at sixth, and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) at tenth place. Of the seven musicals that feature in the complete AFI list, three of these are MGM musicals (www.afi.com).

While all of the major studios produced musical films, MGM had dedicated production units that focused solely on their creation. The Freed unit went further than any other studio in shaping the film genre with its own, unique house style. The house style is about the 'look' that is predominant in all of the studio's musical output. Certain adjectives are often used about the studio style: opulent, extravagant, spectacular, to name a few. Film scholar Steven Cohan, whose work on the MGM musicals has examined and identified the stylistic value of these films observes:

> The studio's musicals all conformed, in one way or another to a distinctive studio look, highly polished but excessively stylized and overblown, at least in the numbers, which characterized the MGM logo and were exploited in publicity as a primary selling point.
>
> (Cohan, 2005: 60)

However, there is far more depth to the creations that MGM produced, and it is essential that the distinction of style here is not referring to the film style as particular to the director of the piece. In this instance style refers to the MGM formula, its own mise-en-scène that emphasised the sheer size and expense that an MGM musical afforded, created between the 1930s to the mid-1950s. Despite a 'uniformed' look as described by Cohan, MGM's leading production units for musical films produced a range of musicals that catered for differing tastes and audience expectations. Whilst drawing influences from the development of musical theatre in New York, MGM crafted a range of sub-genres discussed within this study.

Chapter 1 and 2 focus on the methodology and existing literature and research sources which are prevalent to this topic. Chapter 1 discusses the use of textual analysis of the dance scenes which offers the first sustained detailed analysis of dance on film. There are no existing models of dance analysis that are specific to the use of dance in film or stage musicals, which as genres have specific requirements due to the incorporation of text and potential to further the exposition of the narrative. In first establishing the perimeters of mise en scène, the discussion explores the notion of choreographic style and the integration of music as an instigator in developing the movement phrases. The formulation of a bespoke model of analysis considers the requirements of the genre that are pertinent to the analysis of the selected numbers examined. Throughout the thesis, the growth of dance on film, alongside the choreographers and performers, is discussed regarding the historical development of the genre. The last part of Chapter 1 establishes the boundaries concerning a historical investigation citing the work of theatre scholar Thomas Postlewait (2009), to frame the interpretation of archival material utilised within the study. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical concepts of authorship and adaptation to contextualise and underpin the examination of the authorial voice and the constant change in designation between choreographer and performer. The chapter also considers the value, and in some instances limitations, of the primary source material gathered

during this research. Utilising the work of philosopher Michel Foucault, the power of the author is identified in order to the later implications of the battles between the recognition of a film director over the choreographer.

To fully understand the studio system and musical film as a genre, Chapter 3 contextualises the formation of MGM as a studio. The musical genre is scrutinised in terms of a series of sub-genres that are identifiable within the MGM musical canon. Each of the major studios produced arbitrary formulas for musical films, and while MGM was not exempt from formulaic narrative structures, its assortment of sub-genres was far wider than its competitors.

Chapter 4 and 5 focuses on prominent choreographers from MGM whose filmic contributions provide a significant body of work, both regarding style and in developing dance genres within musical films. Chapter 4 focuses on the role of the early choreographers, or dance directors as they were more commonly known. Establishing the role of the choreographer, intertwined with §studio and union politics, outlines the complexities of being a contracted employee. The work of choreographers Sammy Lee, Bobby Connolly, Dave Gould and Robert Alton established a model of dance direction that gradually developed depending on the dance capabilities of each choreographer. Chapter 5 considers the work of Hermes Pan, Eugene Loring, Michael Kidd and Jack Cole, whose own dance abilities elevated the complexity of choreographic arrangements and developed the technical achievements of dancers. Analysis of dance numbers examines the reoccurrence of stylistic tendencies and considers the choreographers' authorial voices in the work created for screen.

The focus in Chapters 6 and 7 examines the dancers at MGM whose performances and creative input add a further dimension to the authorial debate. Chapter 6 lays down the foundations of the 'star system' and the contractual agreements made between the studios and their roster of talent. The performances of Astaire, Kelly and Marge and Gower Champion are analysed in

terms of authorship as film stars and as choreographers. Chapter 7 focuses on the female dancers at MGM, Eleanor Powell, Ann Miller and Cyd Charisse, whose career trajectories differ dependent on their terpsichorean skills and performance styles. Creatively there is little consideration of the contribution made by women, as choreographers or as performers, and this chapter navigates through gender inequalities prevalent in the studio system.

Following the examination and analysis of the studio system, the remaining chapters move the focus of authorship from film to stage. Part 2 of the thesis explores the concept of adapting film sources to stage musicals, a genre of musical theatre that grew in popularity following the decline of musical film production in the 1960s. This departure from the golden age of Hollywood musicals is significant for two reasons; firstly, the creation of new musicals on Broadway during the 1970s and 1980s was in decline and writers turned to Hollywood for source material. Secondly, when adapting from a film source, *42nd Street* (1933) and *Singin' in the Rain* are already so entwined with the authorial voices of Busby Berkeley and Kelly respectively. Foucault (1969) acknowledged the source material is a powerful platform from which to adapt and develop new ideas. As a growing genre in musical theatre adaptation studies have not sufficiently addressed the concept of screen-to-stage transfers, and this research explores both the process of adaptation between mediums and analyses selected dance numbers. Part 2 will examine the following research questions:

1. Is the choreographer, in the age of revivalism, able to recapture dance forms and aesthetics of past choreographers?
2. To what extent does the choreographer balance originality without recycling what has gone before?

Chapter 8 contextualises the development of Broadway musicals during the 1970s onwards, considering economic factors and the growth in stage musicals borrowing from filmic sources as sub-genre. The chapter explores three main areas: Broadway as a business, nostalgia as a

motivation for the increase in revivals and adaptations of film musicals; and the concepts of adaptation as a process between different forms of media. As a genre, musical theatre has specific requirements in its construction, which often differ from those of film. This chapter presents the ideas of musical director Lehman Engel whose focus was on nurturing the development of new writers for musical theatre during the latter part of the 20th century. While studies of Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (2010), and Linda Hutcheon (2013) engage with adaptation, neither sufficiently consider the transposition between film and stage in detail. The work of Vida L. Midgelow (2007) underpins the discussion of adapting dance as Midgelow discusses the convoluted process of 'revising' and 'reworking' existing dance material. This chapter establishes the concepts of adaptation that are then discussed in the preceding chapters.

Chapters 9 and 10 present case studies on *42nd Street* and *Singin' in the Rain*, stage musicals adapted from film. Although *42nd Street* may not be an MGM product, its inclusion here is necessary because of its critical acclaim and long-running success as a screen-to-stage adaptation. The analyses presented in these chapters considers the approach to adaptation taken by the writers and director-choreographer Gower Champion. The research also examines the process of balancing the audience expectations of Berkeley's cinematic spectacles with the vision and originality of Champion's choreography in the stage production. This chapter also considers the 2001 Broadway revival, which featured some of Champion's original material, and newly expanded dance numbers by choreographer Randy Skinner. Chapter 10 examines the creative process behind *Singin' In the Rain,* adapted to the stage in the early 1980s. This musical is unique in that it has had two separate adaptations, a 1983 London production and a 1985 Broadway production, the latter under the helm of choreographer Twyla Tharp. The analyses presented here make a comparison with the film choreography of Kelly, its adaptation to a proscenium arch theatre and the new choreographic work created in the two stage productions. Unlike *42nd Street*, American audiences did not warm to *Singin' in the Rain* in its first production, but it has fared much better in various UK productions.

Throughout this thesis the focus remains consistent on examining the potential for a choreographer to be considered an auteur, an area of theatre and film rarely discussed in authorship debates. The potential for choreographers as authors is clear, yet the collaborative nature of film production often overshadows the work of individuals. Within the analysis, the development of dance genres, notably tap and jazz underpins the choreographic work and charts the growth of these dance forms as essential contributors to the creation of dance works and one has to consider to what extent MGM musicals have contributed to the development of these genres. Transferring the authorial lens between choreographers and film stars widens the scope of the research as it allows for more definite identification of roles (between that of the star and choreographer) and contributions (regarding what is the choreographer's work). Much of the research has focused on the past, due to the significant body of work readily available and the lack of industry recognition. Widening the authorship debate to incorporate concepts of adaptation has enabled a discussion that focuses on a genre, that in the 21st century, has realigned its search for source material to borrow more readily from the screen. The work of MGM choreographers may not have been recognised for their contributions to dance during the peak of studio production in the 1950s, but its legacy continues to influence and inspire choreography within musical theatre and film.

Chapter 1: Methodology

A historical portrait of the birth and development of dance on film and its later transition to the stage underpins this analysis. Navigating through recorded footage, personal interviews and studio production records and files provides a rich tapestry of materials to draw upon. This study utilises an approach that engages with both historical and dance analysis. This research employs close textual analysis of dance on film that explores the mise en scène, or personal style, that is created within the picture frame. The following chapter identifies the principles of mise en scène and focuses on its application to dance as utilised in this study. At the end of this chapter a bespoke model of analysis is outlined that takes into account components such as style, music and movement vocabulary that are crucial to the creation of choreography. No analytical model, either for dance or for film, exists that is specific to musical theatre and film choreography so the model established within this chapter provides a systematic overlay that maintains consistency in the analysis presented within this thesis.

Similarly, theatre scholar Thomas Postlewait (2009) outlines the difficulties with theatre historiography due to the lack of technology available in earlier periods. Postlewait outlines a list of considerations which are engaged with to maintain rigor and parity in the ensuing investigation.

1.1 Dance on Film Analysis

In outlining the theoretical debates of mise en scène film scholar Adrian Martin states 'the twinning of a camera movement with an actor's gesture is thus part and parcel of an entire approach, on Minnelli's part, to film style, and the craft of pleasurable, effective stylisation' (Martin 2014: xvi). Whilst alternative, and somewhat more traditional definitions of mise en scène are discussed in chapter 2 as imbedded within the auteur debate, in this chapter its fundamental meaning refers to Martin's focus on style and its ability to transform 'a narrative's

destination; it can transform our mood or our understanding as we experience the film' (Martin 2014: 19-20). Film critic V.F. Perkins, whose textual analysis focuses not only on the visual elements, such as lighting and editing, also pays attention to the narrative, characters and structure. Perkins' analytical model forgoes the theoretical complexities discussed in the next chapter, instead he suggests that in film spectatorship the analysis develops from 'the hybrid nature of film, the synthesis of reality and magic implied by the cinema's basic mechanism' (1972: 121). The analyses that are contained throughout this thesis are a close analysis of the dance elements projected from the screen. Film scholar John Gibbs establishes mise en scène as 'the contents of the frame' (2002:5) and identifies a series of elements that are visible within the frame, some of which are utilised within this study:

- Lighting
- Costume
- Space, Set and Props
- Camera Angles and Framing
- Music
- The dance vocabulary and genre of movement

All of these elements integrate to formulate the visual representation of dance on screen that is discussed in later chapters. Lighting in itself does little to influence the dance, beyond setting mood and atmosphere depending on the location. The lighting is usually used, and discussed in the analysis, as an additional means (beyond the camera lens) to direct audience focus. The use of costume in film musicals often becomes central to the creation of the choreography, the attire of Astaire and Kelly contributes to their own personal mise en scène. Both dancers incorporate costuming into their dance styles to create movements that are influenced by the costume or, in reversal, wear costumes because the movement dictates the need. Set and props, again heavily utilised in the work of Astaire and Kelly, and also in the dance numbers created by Champion,

Pan and Kidd, have a significant importance in the analysis as they provide limitless opportunities for the dance to work with levels and space. The placement of set alters the viewpoint of the audience through its proximity in the camera lens and allows the choreographer to arrange dancers in the frame to either provide momentary distraction or as a framing device for the star dancer, an element that Pan and Loring utilised in their work for dancers Ann Miller and Cyd Charisse. In the work of Eleanor Powell, set and props became integral to the choreographic work as they provided versatility and creative opportunities in a genre of dance, tap, which is so concentrated on the footwork and rhythms. In terms of space, beyond the confines of the traditional proscenium arch theatre, the studio soundstage offers far greater opportunities for dance, which with the use of differing camera angles, guided the spectator to the focal point at any given time. Kelly's work particularly utilises the expanse of the soundstages to create the dream ballets that existed in another world, beyond the limitations of real time and space, such as the ballet in *An American in Paris* (1951) which transported the audience through several historical monuments of Paris within a few camera frames. Martin acknowledges that the close relationship between mise en scène and dance seems logical because of the ability for dance to create a 'heightened, lyrical film style' (2014: 53) that was fundamentally in relationship with the use of dynamics and use of space. As Martin's discussion on, what he terms cine-dance, develops it is interesting to notice he questions the possibilities of the use of dance in relation to what the director can achieve. Yet at no point does Martin acknowledge the work of the choreographer in creating the movement, a dichotomy that continues to ignore the creation of dance for the cinema screen. Martin's analysis, whilst detailed in terms of the visual components of the screen, does not consider the actual dance content. The analysis in this thesis is grounded in the use of dance vocabulary as a central element of the observations as different genres of dance, such as tap, jazz and ballet, operate differently and contribute to the overall movement style created. Similarly, awareness of the musical accompaniment is continually referenced due to the close relationship between the movement and the accompanying orchestrations.

For dance in musical theatre and film, particularly those dance elements that possess a narrative structure, the location of the number within the wider context of the musical film's plot needs to be considered. The resulting analysis will be more effective if the spectator has an understanding of the motivation behind each movement phrase. This is less problematic in the work of choreographers such as Berkeley, whose use of spectacle over narrative integration is more frequent, yet these musical numbers are encapsulated by the overarching narrative surrounding them, for example a production number is presented as part of the narrative concerning the creation of a Broadway musical.

1.2 Style

Style, in dance, is a problematic issue; to the dancer and choreographer, it is often central to the intention behind a passage of movement. The concept of style is addressed in this thesis through the visual aesthetic and body of work by specific choreographers whose creations are examined. Style has many layers and meanings –influenced by music, period, approach to choreography and the movement language and genres engaged by the choreographers. In jazz dance, most utilised in musical theatre and film, there are many so-called 'branches' which have evolved through both the development of music and the individual influences from dancers and/or choreographers. Dance scholars Lindsay Guarino and Wendy Oliver (2014) cite *authentic jazz dance* as a style of movement that is associated with the traditions of jazz music from the 1920s to 1940s. It is rooted in Africanist traditions and most associated with social dances such as the Charleston, Jitterbug and Cakewalk. Guarino and Oliver indicate that later styles, such as theatrical jazz dance, musical theatre dance and commercial jazz dance, are classed as 'jazz-influenced' forms rather than authentic. This is because they are less influenced by the development of jazz music and, in some cases, became a more codified study of work through dancers/choreographers such as Jack Cole, Matt Mattox and Luigi (Guarino and Oliver, 2014: 24-29). Each branch of Jazz Dance can also be sub-divided into their styles, usually

dictated by the music or the period or, as in the case of Bob Fosse, are created from the specific movement vocabulary of the choreographer. As of 2017, Fosse remains the only Broadway choreographer whose style is instantly recognisable. Dance scholar Geraldine Morris defines style within the work of ballet choreographer Frederick Ashton, by exploring the potential and conflicting issues surrounding style in movement. Morris articulates the need to understand the training methods and use of dance at the specific period investigated (Morris 2012: 8). Much of this thesis is located within the 1940s when a significant amount of dance was captured on film, and choreographers such as Kelly, Cole, Fosse and Pan began to experiment and engage with both tap and jazz dance idioms. These choreographers were also of an age where they discussed and reflected upon their influences through interviews and documentaries, which continues to offer a rich body of material that assists in the unpacking of their choreographic approaches.

British philosopher Graham McFee asserts that for style in dance to exist, the work must be decipherable – that is, it must be created by an artist (1992: 197-199). Throughout his writing, McFee acknowledges the ability to ascertain individual style, which in this case could refer to both the dance and the choreographer. Prolific choreographers discussed in later chapters (namely Astaire and Kelly) were known for both their performance work *and* their choreographic contributions. To this end, the individual style will be analysed both in the on-screen performances and film choreography. This becomes rather more complex when dealing with a choreographer who is creating a movement for a dancer, who in turn, has a specific individual style. For example, Loring created several on-screen dances for Charisse, utilising both balletic and jazz idioms within the vocabulary – but to what extent is Loring's choreographic style influenced by the performance style of the dancer? In certain dance performance contexts, the emphasis will perhaps showcase the creative output of the choreographer. However, in film, while plentiful opportunities abound for creativity, the star of the film is central to the production and the contracted choreographer has certain obligations to fulfil. The resulting analysis, to some

extent, will differ dependent on the dancer performing the work. In cinematic dance, there are many examples of collaborations between the dancer and the choreographer, as demonstrated in the work of Pan and Astaire, so a keen eye needs to not only look for the choreographic style but also at the body of the work of the dancer being analysed.

McFee also addresses complex layers stating that individual style is only evident with the underpinning of a dance technique (1992: 203). Elaborating on the issue, McFee acknowledges that not all dance with prescribed technique is open to having stylistic elements, but provides a framework which suggests that not *all* movement can be ascertained as having an individual style. Morris (2012: 5-9) suggests that knowledge is required for the acceptable mode of executing a movement at the time in which it was choreographed. Dance training, particularly regarding dance science and the mechanics of the body, has significantly developed throughout the last forty years and, therefore, the aesthetics of a movement differs dependent on which era it is being performed. The underpinning of technical requirements in jazz dance is somewhat problematic as, until the mid-1950s, there was no codified training method. Dancer and teacher Mattox, whose jazz dance technique became established world-wide, was one of many methods, or 'styles' of technical training that existed. However, in the films of MGM during the 1940s and 1950s, the movement vocabulary that was evolving was not based on a prescribed technique, although an underpinning (mostly classical ballet) was evident, it was devised through the personal choices of the choreographers themselves. To this end, it is imperative to look at a range of works, for instance, those choreographed and danced by Astaire and Kelly, to gain sufficient breadth in the scope and range of work created.

Fundamental problems arise when the analyst lacks sufficient knowledge and experience as a dance practitioner. A trained dancer, such as myself or Morris, has far greater understanding of the technical and stylistic requirements of movement. To most dancers, style is inherent in the training and becomes an instinctive element of the performative experience. A dancer may

adopt their individual style, yet through experience, may spend much of their career interpreting and dancing the style dictated by choreographers. However, McFee makes a clear rationale for the need to establish the concept of style for its employment in analysis. Dance philosopher Julie Van Camp raises concerns about dance criticism and the use of terminology suggesting:

> The lack of an absolutely standardized dance vocabulary also makes it difficult to identify creative and interpretive contributions from the perceivable performance alone, although critics occasionally draw such inferences.
>
> (Van Camp, 2014: 146)

The dance analyst, who is well-versed in the vocabulary appropriate to the dance style examined, requires no need for a 'standardized' vocabulary as suggested above. Different dance genres have specific terminology that helps visualise the movement, or in the case of tap dance, often infers the rhythmical components of the step to be executed. The formulation of such a generic language could reduce the dance analysis to a repetition of words that identifies what makes each dance so different and unique – the individual style of the choreographer.

1.3 Music

Dance scholar Stephanie Jordan, in her study of the relationship between dance and music in twentieth-century classical ballet, observes that music was once most often thought of as instrumental in the creation of a dance work (2000: 4). While many famous ballets have large orchestral scores by influential composers, the mode of dance music, or music for dance, in musical theatre and film is somewhat different. *Oklahoma!* (1943), whose extended use of dance within the story telling, uses themes and melodies that already exist within Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's score. Standard practice in musical theatre, and film is for the production team to engage an orchestrator who will arrange the music for the orchestra. Music scholar Kara Anne Gardner describes de Mille's experiences creating the dances for *Oklahoma!* as frustrating and attributes all credit for the dance music to orchestrator Robert Russell Bennett. Gardner observes that in utilising the existing melodies of Rodgers 'they carried

associations that added another layer of meaning to the dance' (2016: 33). In a survey of established orchestrators during the golden age of Broadway musicals, theatre scholar Steven Suskin details the complexities of the collaborative relationships between the composer and the orchestrator (2009: 173-175). Suskin outlines that the preliminary musical numbers in rehearsal are written as a song sheet by the composer. It is only during rehearsals that the music is embellished and expanded, the dance music is arranged during the rehearsal process. Choreographer Susan Stroman describes the process of arranging the dance music during the 1992 rehearsals for *Crazy For You*:

> What I do is take a melody and then go with my dance arranger – in this case, Peter Howard – and we lock ourselves in a room, and play with different rhythms and styles for it. When I make up the story of the dance, if I want to be flirtatious for example we may play it in a soft shoe rhythm; if I want it to be romantic, we play it in a jazz waltz; if I want it to be extremely romantic, we'll play it in a grand waltz. Once I've heard all the rhythms I can possibly play with this melody, then I'll construct the story and within that story the rhythms will match up and help to tell it.
>
> (Stroman in Shenton, 1993 [Souvenir Brochure])

Stroman's description of the collaboration between music arranger and choreographer articulates the interrelationship between music and dance, a provides one example of the how the music and dance content influence each other.

At MGM, Conrad Salinger was one of the most influential and prolific orchestrators who created a sound closely identified with the studio style. Whilst Jordan's work identifies the diverse range of composers who specifically created music for dance, musical theatre seldom works within that model due to the integration of music and lyrics. In working with Pan, Astaire also engaged a pianist who would develop the dance arrangements as the choreographic collaboration was developed. Classical pianist Hal Borne became a frequent member of the rehearsal team during Astaire's initial film contract at RKO studios during the 1930s (Mueller, 1985: 44). Although there would be an assigned orchestrator to the entire film, it was standard practice, as for musical theatre as outlined above, for a dance arranger to work in collaboration with the

choreographer to create the necessary 'dance music'. Film scholar John Mueller observed that while Astaire was an accomplished musician, the musical arrangement of his dances remained very much within the AABA format, the common structure of the 32-bar popular song (1985: 19-20). Throughout his film dances, Astaire remained traditional in his use of popular songs from composers such as George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Irving Berlin. In contrast, the dance music used in a Kelly film initiated from a song, but its structure would break free of the traditional song mode and be arranged to allow the dance to take focus. This is particularly evident in his film ballets, which in similar vein to de Mille's work on *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* (1945), would use the melody of songs already heard in the film but arranged to work collaboratively with the dance movement.

The analysis here makes continual references to the musical accompaniment, more so than the actual structure and arrangement of the music. As Jordan observes:

> Music, has also been seen to suggest space, as up and down in terms of pitch, or near and far in terms of volume, colours, from different instrumental timbres; the passing of time, at different rates, or as time arrested; or physical gesture, as the dynamic character of a musical unit suggests the quality of an action.
>
> (2000: 68)

Jordan's comments here echo much of the relationship between dance and the choreography for film examined in this study. It is very rare for a movement phrase to work in opposition to the accompaniment unless intended as a suggestion of some discord within the narrative. Dance and music in musical theatre, more often than not, work in harmony as the orchestration and arrangement of the music functions to enhance the dance movement on the screen. Jordan's mention of the 'instrumental timbres' is significant when analysing the tap genre as the tap shoe, and the dancer in possession of the instrument allows for differing tones and qualities of sound to be executed. This is dependent on the placement of the shoe on the floor as there are several regions of the shoe that when struck, can produce varying pitches. Figure 1.1 illustrates the

differing sounds that can be executed by relating the map of the sole of the shoe to the different percussive drums contained in a traditional drum kit.

Figure 1.1: The tap shoe and its relationship to drums (Glover and Weber 2000: 21)

In addition to the use of the shoe, the body weight of the dancer greatly affects the quality of the sound produced which can alternate between loud and soft. Different dancers discussed in this thesis have very different 'timbres' in their tap sound. Astaire often uses a heavier weight into the floor and flat feet, Kelly is lighter in his tone and is more on the balls of the feet, even though his body weight is more grounded. Eleanor Powell and Ann Miller share the similarity in the rapid execution of beats, but Powell's pitch and tone are influenced by the music, unlike Miller's which often stays at the same pitch throughout.

Utilising the work of composer Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, Jordan outlines a list of music components that are significant in the relationship between music and dance:

1. Pitch
2. Intensity of Sound
3. Timbre
4. Duration
5. Time
6. Rhythm
7. Rests
8. Melody
9. Counterpoint
10. Chords
11. Harmonic
12. Phrasing
13. Construction
14. Orchestration

(Jaques-Dalcroze 1921, cited in Jordan, 2000: 15)

As this study does not focus predominately on the incorporation of music, not all of these elements are discussed in each analysis. However, Pitch, Intensity, Timbre, Time, Rhythm, Phrasing and Orchestration are addressed if they have a particular influence on the choreography or vice-versa.

1.4 The Bespoke Model

The resulting analysis in this thesis combines elements discussed throughout this chapter, yet constructs a bespoke model that is more applicable to the study of musical theatre and film dance works. Table 1.2 below outlines the analysis model that will be utilised within this thesis:

Component	
Plot Point	Establishing where the dance sits within the overall narrative arc. What has preceded the number; what action follows its conclusion.
Mode of Presentation/Medium	The setting and location of the number – for example a show-within-a-show or pedestrian. The medium allows for distinguishing between dances designed for camera and those for the stage.
Genre and Style	The genre/s of dance utilised within the choreographic and any stylistic influences.
Dancer/Choreographer	The relationship between the dancer and choreographer is an important consideration regarding how much influence the dancer/s has on the choreographic content and vice versa.
Musical Accompaniment	The relationship between the music and dance in terms of pitch, intensity, timbre, time, rhythm, phrasing and orchestration.
Vocabulary and Structure	The structure of the dance in terms of narrative development, location and phrasing of the movement motifs. The specific use of dance vocabulary appropriate to the genre of dance utilised within the choreography.
Set, Costume and Lighting	Within musicals, the use of set and costumes often influence the movement or can dictate the use of levels and placement of dancers within the space. Lightning, in naturalistic settings provides mood, in more theatrical and dream settings it can act as a means to guide the focus of the spectator to a specific part of the frame.

Table 1.1: Outline of Analytical Model for Thesis

1.5 Historiography

In his introduction to theatre historiography, Postlewait identifies the complexities of working with historical research stressing the importance, and difficulties, that researchers face when interpreting events and 'constructing arguments based upon principles of possibility and

plausibility' (2009: 1). Hollywood has its own rich history and throughout the 20th-century film stars have supplied readers with their verbatim history within the studio system, however, this form of history is more journalistic than scholastic, and some details are not always remembered accurately. Whilst the direct words of such performers are relevant, this research has gone beyond just oral histories and ensured that comments are cross-referenced with archival material and, where possible, with societal and political happenings at the time of the event. Postlewait states, when navigating through the problematic issues concerning archival materials, that 'we must always distinguish between what the historical event might have been and what the documentation, produced purposefully by the participants, suggests about the event' (2009: 141). One significant advantage that this study has had is that a large proportion of the performance material survives on film, so regarding analysis, the original is accessible. There is no visual or oral record of the rehearsal and creative processes which provides some limitations, however, some dancers and choreographers have discussed their experiences in the studio, but is this information reliable? There is no direct positive or negative answer to this question, however the archives potentially provide material that validates, or in the words of Postlewait 'contextualize' (2009: 144) the research to provide some form of answer.

Fundamentally, Postlewait outlines that there is not one model or system to engage with in interpreting and analysing the theatrical past. Below are four areas that Postlewait suggests that all theatrical investigations should incorporate:

- Agent – refers to the author but not necessarily in the purest sense and could include the creative forces that influence the production
- World – suggesting that events in the world and the ability for theatre to present its own world take influence
- Audiences – more specifically the words of the critics who have witnessed the events first-hand
- Artistic Heritage - drawing upon influences from the traditions appropriated to differing art forms.

(Postlewait, 2009: 9-17)

The model above provides an approach that offers flexibility and aligns itself well to the scope of the research for this thesis. Postlewait's historiographical focus is not so rigid that it can only encompass one specific artistic discipline and allows for a cross-examination between film and dance works as discussed throughout the thesis.

This chapter has established the fundamental methodological approaches engaged in the research and analyses. Dance is, as is the case with all art forms, subjective and whilst opinions expressed are personal, they are grounded in my own experience as a dancer, teacher and choreographer in the dance and musical theatre field. Working collaboratively as a performer and creator have informed my own practice in terms of the interdisciplinary nature of musical theatre and a rich dance analysis is drawn from such experiences. The focus of the analysis is not to determine whether the choreography is successful, that in itself would be another study, but to examine the development of dance, and in some instances, personal style as applicable to the work of choreographers consulted during this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review is divided in to two main sections; Primary and Secondary source material. The first section discusses primary source material gained from interviews and oral histories, the use of archival material and the video material available for the analyses. The second section, and its three sub-categories, sets up the theoretical perspectives utilised within the thesis, namely those of authorship and adaptation studies. Whilst the theories are discussed in the corresponding chapters, their inclusion here establishes their background to underpin the later use of the terminology. The last section discusses dance in musical theatre in terms of historical perspectives that constantly interlink with authorship and adaptation approaches. The purpose of this chapter is to situate the thesis within existing theoretical perspectives that have provided the lens through which this research has evolved.

2.1 Primary Source Material

Primary source material has been gained from the following means: interviews, archival research and extensive use of video footage. The history of Hollywood has been particularly well documented in terms of the birth, and eventual decline, of the studio system that operated in Hollywood during the 1920s through to the 1950s. History scholar Ronald L. Davis conducted over 400 interviews with actors and other studio personnel through the 1970s and 1980s which now form part of the South Methodist University (SMU) Oral History Program which are available to researchers at the Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles. Several dancers and choreographers, who are now deceased and were seldom interviewed, provided insightful commentary on the workings of film production and choreography within MGM. There are limitations due to the interviews having been conducted by a researcher who had a specific agenda that does not always probe further in relation to the themes in this thesis. There are also limits in the information that respondents were willing to give, some subjects present

articulate and well considered answers that offer depth in the material provided, others offer cursory acknowledgement but fail to elaborate points further. The TCM Archival Project, housed at the Mary Pickford Research Center in Los Angeles, and the Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, University of Georgia Special Collections Libraries, contain unedited footage from interviews that were incorporated in documentaries and special features that appeared on MGM Laserdiscs, videotapes and DVDs. Once again, a significant number of studio personnel, mostly actors, have been interviewed and provide some illuminating commentary, but are somewhat hindered by the interviewer's line of enquiry and, given the age of many of the respondents, in terms of their recollections. Where stories have sometimes contradicted one another, they have been corroborated with other information from sources such as production files and other accounts.

I have also conducted interviews personally with a range of respondents drawn from film and theatre backgrounds. There are few surviving studio personnel and of those only a few were willing to be interviewed or responded to contact. Again, in some instances, recollections are not always as crisp and accurate as they might have been and their accounts have been cross-referenced from other sources.

MGM archival material proved to be a constant challenge as there is not one central collection in a library within the US. Upon the demolition of the studio backlot in the 1970s, film footage and musical scores were either destroyed or used as landfill. What does remain of the studio materials is distributed between several libraries across the USA. Production files are rich in their detail, although the amount of material differs significantly from film to film. The files contain studio memos, contracts, publicity material, budget reports and various versions of screenplays. Through access to the material I could gain more depth in understanding the mechanics behind the making of a film musical and the studio memos in particular highlighted the politics of the studio system. Production files for producers Jack Cummings and Joseph

Pasternak are not available, although some Pasternak material is housed at the Margaret Herrick Library where other remnants of MGM's history are stored, such as the scenic and costume designs. Personal collections of Astaire and Kelly are located at Boston University, Astaire's material only dates up to the late 1930s and Kelly's collection was restricted for access. I later discovered that Turner Entertainment in Georgia, and Mrs. Patricia Kelly Ward (Kelly's widow) are in possession of further materials but enquiries about access received no response.

Archival material for musical theatre in the US is first-rate, and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (NYPL) at Lincoln Center contains a vast range of material pertaining to both dance and theatre history. Specific production files for *42nd Street* in the Michael Stewart Papers and *Singin' in the Rain* from the Betty Comden and Adolph Green Papers, proved to be a goldmine of information concerning the creative, and adaptive, process that each musical went through. The Lincoln Center library also houses the Theatre on Film and Tape (TOFT) archive which has recordings of theatrical performances. An invaluable source however, viewing dance material is somewhat restrictive as the choreography was not designed with the camera in mind. The Marge and Gower Champion collection at the Library of Congress surveyed much of their Hollywood career but did not contain any material pertaining to Gower's involvement with *42nd Street*. Unfortunately, in the UK there has not been as much focus on preserving theatrical history, specifically in terms of musical theatre and the filming of productions. The Theatre Museum collection is now located in the Victoria & Albert Museum, but no materials related to this study were utilised. With little to no access to video footage it proves a difficult task to conduct research into UK productions.

The legacy of the MGM musical is indebted to the ability to capture dance on film, every MGM musical has been available on home media formats. These sources enhanced the ability to analyse the movement and survey the stylistic qualities from both the studio, and the choreographers and performers that execute them.

2.2 Secondary Source Material

2.2.1 Authorship

Established by film critic Andrew Sarris in 1962, the auteur theory is a much debated and often contested form of film criticism that has been used, most frequently, to ascertain authorship of a given movie by a director. Its discussion over the last 40 years is best viewed in the anthologies of film scholars John Caughie (1981), Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink (2001), Virginia Wright Wexman (2003) and Barry Keith Grant (2008). Whilst acknowledgement is made that there are prominent key authors on this theory, the anthologies referenced in this section provide a historical and theoretical overview of significant developments within the auteur debate since its inception.

The roots of the *auteur* theory stem from a 1954 article by film director François Truffaut in the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Truffaut, in addressing the tradition of quality and tendencies in French cinema, suggests that screenwriters are not the only authors of a film, but that directors such as Jean Renoir and Jacques Tati are 'auteurs *who* often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct' (Truffaut, 1954, cited in Grant, 2008: 16). In the aftermath of Truffaut's article in 1957, André Bazin, founder editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma,* discussed the subject, providing a name for the framework known as *la politique des auteurs*. This theoretical approach had been often used to establish the 'greatness' of the work of American film directors, such as Minnelli and Hitchcock. Whilst not establishing himself as a staunch supporter of *la politique des auteurs,* Bazin does acknowledge its place as a critical lens through which to view a director's work. However, he made it very clear that this critical theory was not yet sufficient to distinguish an elite group of *auteurs* from the multitude of active directors. His clearest explanation was thus:

> The *politique des auteurs* consist, in short, of choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then

> assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next. (Bazin, 1957, cited in Grant, 2008: 25)

Sarris first introduced the concept of the *politique des auteurs* to an American audience in the journal *Film Culture,* a term he translated simply as the auteur theory. Whilst acknowledging Bazin's concerns regarding the ranking of film directors, Sarris supports the usefulness of the theory when critically analysing and discussing films as a critic and proposed a framework for its application. Sarris proposes that the following principles are utilised in his definition of the theory:

> 1. The technical competence of a director as a criterion scale of values
> 2. The distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature
> 3. Interior meaning – the ultimate glory of the cinema as art. Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material.
>
> (Sarris, 1962, cited in Grant, 2008: 42-43)

Sarris developed this outline by proposing that the above criteria be envisioned as 'Three concentric circles: the outer circle as technique; the middle circle, personal style; and the inner circle, interior meaning.' (Sarris, 1962, cited in Grant, 2008: 43)

Embedded within auteur theory is the matter of mise en scène that is perhaps best associated with Sarris' third definition. It is described as the 'stylistic signature of the director' (Caughie, 1995: 12) and provides the closest understanding of the personality of the director. Its literal translation as described by *The Oxford Dictionary of Theatre and Performance* is: 'the placing (or setting) of the scene (Postelwait, 2010). Theatre scholar Patrice Pavis provides a more detailed description of the term, along with other terms often associated, often incorrectly, with the theoretical explanation. Pavis defines mise en scène as:

> *Mise en scène* is thus a performance considered as a system of meaning

> controlled by a director or a collective. It is an abstract, theoretical notion, not a concrete and empirical one. It is the tuning of theatre for needs of stage and audience. *Mise en scène* puts theatre into practice, but does so according to an implicit system of organisation of meaning.
>
> (2013: 4)

Its original use was associated with theatre, however in relation to its use within the cinema, film scholars Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink suggest 'it refers to whatever appears in the film frame, including those aspects that overlap with the art of theatre: setting, lighting, costume and the behaviour of the figures' (2001: 269). By these definitions, its use as a solitary critical analysis becomes somewhat limited as it ultimately embeds itself within the wider principles of the auteur theory. Whilst mise en scène considers the ability of a director to stage a scene for the camera, auteur theory encompasses not only the visual style of the director, but also their overall control over the finished product (Cook and Bernink, 2001: 269).

In a 1977 update on the auteur theory, Sarris clarified his original outline with a more detailed description of his use of the term mise en scène, explaining that it incorporates 'cutting, camera movement, pacing, the direction of the players and their placement in the décor' (Sarris, 1977, cited in Wright, 2003: 27). It becomes apparent that one of the main facets of the auteur theory is embedded within the interpretation and meanings that are devised by the spectator. Albeit, in order to critically analyse and interpret a work through the auteur lens, the spectator is required to have knowledge of a directors full body of work.

In the 1963 *Film Quarterly* article, 'Circles and Squares', film critic Pauline Kael took aim at the premises outlined above which resulted in a long standing sparring between her and Sarris in various film journals. In response to technical competence, Kael suggested that the director should be critiqued on the basis of what he/she creates rather than such a narrow criterion, stating that 'in works of a lesser rank, technical competence can help to redeem the weaknesses of the material' (Kael, 1963: 15). Concerning the second principle, in relation to the noticeable

personality of the director, Kael suggested that 'often the works in which we are most aware of personality of the director are his worst films' (Kael, 1963: 15), and are not considered landmark in the career of a given director.

The auteur theory primarily concerns itself with the artistic/creative mark that the director makes upon the resulting product. Whilst it may seem a somewhat elusive way in which to rank one director in relation to the next, it provides an outline from which to critique the artistic work of a director. In terms of this study the aim is not to rank choreographers against one another, it is more focused on identifying their authorial contribution to the films and/or stage musicals they have been involved with. Film scholar Peter Wollen states that the theory 'implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors where none had been seen before' (Wollen, 2013: 61). Wollen acknowledged that the application of this theory has divided into two main strands, one directed to unravel the core meanings of a given film, and the second geared to consideration of the stylistic elements of given directors. Sarris conceded in his 1977 article that 'auteurism is and always has been more a tendency than a theory' (cited in Wright, 2002: 29), one that indulges the critic in a process of identifying unifying features within the film of a specific director.

In its initial inception, the auteur theory was limited solely to the body of work of a director. Yet as the theory has continued to be debated, the role of authorship has extended further afield, to acknowledge that in the collaborative process there are many 'authors' whose work can be closely examined. English scholar Jerome Christensen (2006) put a case forward for MGM as contributing to studio authorship, citing that 'the emergence of cinematic works of art is not individual genius, not technology, not even money, but the corporate organization of the studio' (Christensen, 2006 cited in Grant, 2008: 167). To delve further into identifying authorship, particularly in the case of MGM, Matthew Bernstein (2008 cited in Grant, 2008: 180-190)) proposed that the producer could be considered as an *auteur*. He credits the producer with negotiating the legalities of bringing the creative elements together and having the overriding

final say on the plot, casting, and scriptwriting. In his work on MGM's musical film producer Freed, Hugh Fordin (1984) paints a very detailed picture of the involvement that Freed had in the production of the many celebrated classic musical films released during his tenure.

In more recent years, there has been increasing discussion on the Internet proposing the idea that film actors could be considered auteurs, particularly actors whose characters share a similarity from one film to the next. Film scholar Richard Dyer produced two studies exploring the concept of the Hollywood 'star' system and provides a theoretical framework through which to explore the development and perception of leading actors. In his 1986 book *Stars* he addressed the concept surrounding the star as an author, although he made it clear that one must clearly define the parameters surrounding such an examination, in terms of making the distinction clear about their contribution to the production of the film. Similarly, in his study of actor James Cagney, author Patrick McGilligan suggested that:

> An actor may influence a film as much as a writer, director or producer; some actors are more influential than others; and there are certain rare few performers whose acting capabilities and screen personas are so powerful that they embody and define the very essence of their films.
>
> (cited in Dyer, 1986a: 174)

It seems very clear in film criticism and theory that the musical film is ranked low in the hierarchy of scholarship, with only limited mention of authorship. It was not until the 1980s that the theoretical concepts of the genre were fully considered by film scholars Rick Altman (1987) and Jane Feuer (1993). Without fully understanding auteur theory one could be forgiven for thinking that due to the highly collaborative nature of musical film, it is not possible to distinguish or perceive authorship within this genre. However, all film, in part, is a collaborative effort, and the musical clearly expresses stylistic tendencies through its use of visual imagery, musical content and use of dance, so why has this not been explored further? As outlined above, if a movie is deemed poor from a critical standpoint, the auteur theory provides a basis on which to commend its merits utilising recurring attributes of the creative persons concerned with the making of the

film. Whilst the theory has been extended to other members of the collaborative team, it seems remarkable that the work of the choreographer has not been explored, especially in consideration that the golden age of cinema was when the evolution of dance in musical film was at its height.

In his article 'What is the Author?', philosopher Michel Foucault suggests that during the 19th century, when the ownership rights of authors was established, text had a more powerful, and legally protected, voice in popular culture . Foucault's assertion of the function of the author gives power and legitimacy to the creator of the work. Whilst not discussing authorship in film Foucault's discussion on literary discources (1969: 108-109) relates to the struggle of choreographers within the Hollywood film industry. The choreographer's voice is ever present within the thousands of musical films that were created from the major studios, yet recognition of the choreographic contribution disturbed the balance of power between the choreographer and the director, who through union representation, received the attribution of authorial control on the entire project. In utilising the writing of Saint Jerome, Foucault outlines four criteria that could identify the author of a work, albeit in the literary sense. The criteria address value, by detracting works that are considered inferior, contradictions of previously established theoretical perspectives, a writing style that is in contrast to previous writings, and finally texts that utilise writings from an author after their death. Although acknowledging that the criteria does not stand as strongly in modern literary criticism the third point is pertinent suggesting 'one must also exclude works that are written in a different style, containing words and expressions not ordinarily found in the writer's production (the author here conceived as a stylistic unity)' (1969: 111). The notion of style, as embedded within the identifying of film directors as auteurs, demonstrates an alignment of Sarris and Foucault in their observations: in order to ascertain the authorial voice the stylistic elements of the author should remain consistent. Foucault's identification of the authorial voice gives power, and potency, to an identifiable artist whose work is recognisable through a series of stylistic traits found within the body of work. The

hegemony of designating authorship gives legitimacy and in turn, as developed within this thesis, allows an examination of the dichotomy of power politics endemic to the studio system.

2.2.2. Authorship in Theatre

'No playwright was harmed in the making of this production' (Gardner, 2009) is the final statement arts journalist Lyn Gardner expressed in her theatre blog in *The Guardian* newspaper. Gardner's comment acknowledges the shift of attributing beyond that of the traditional playwright and the ensuing tensions that arise. Two of her 2009 online entries discuss the rise of the auteur status in theatre, firstly in evaluating the spread of an epidemic amongst the rise of the theatre director, and in her second article acknowledging that existing works are reliant on reinterpretation by contemporary audiences. The idea of authorship has spread to live theatre, although its scholarly debate is somewhat limited in scope and consideration. Gardner on one hand stands up in defence of the playwright, but then accepts that when said playwright is deceased it is inevitable that deconstruction of a play will evolve. Similarly, in theatre scholar Gerald Rabkin's article 'Is there Text on This Stage?' (1985), disputes of authorship between playwrights and theatre directors are examined. Utilising the writings of Roland Barthes, Rabkin scrutinised the ownership of the work and then the dissemination of the text, which he suggested then becomes open to interpretation by the reader:

> Barthes's logic is as follows: the work may indeed "belong" to its author, but the Text, which exists only in discourse, "defies fillation." Once the text is released to the world of discourse, the Author-God who created it controls its meaning no more than any reader.
>
> (Barthes, cited in Rabkin, 1985: 152)

The debate surrounding the auteur in theatre seems to concern itself more specifically with the role of ownership of the source material, rather than considering the physical production that is created as a result. In her study of the theatre director-auteur, theatre scholar Avra

Sidiropoulou charted the historical growth of directors in contemporary theatre. Correlating with the original concept of visual oeuvre in the work of the director, Sidiropoulou acknowledges:

> In current auteur work, "spectacle", translated as visual perfection, plays a more prominent role than ever. However, criticism is ruthless in those cases where directors try to make up for dramaturgical and directorial inadequacies by resorting to sensational effect. Most of the time, heavily image-saturated performances are criticised for treating the verbal text merely as an excuse, a convenient cover-up of gratuitous forms and visual ploys.
>
> (2011: 18)

In relation to musical theatre, the application of authorship has all but been ignored, particularly concerning choreographers. The musical theatre of the 1960s and 1970s similarly saw a move away from the traditional book musical, paving way for a new breed of musical play. These musicals strayed away from the linear narrative driven plot and presented the 'concept' musical, which challenged audiences with a piece that was structured to represent a theme or message, rather than the tried and tested character and plot driven vehicles of the 1940s and 1950s, that often romanticised the lives of their characters. With this change in structure, musical theatre saw the rise of the director-choreographer, the dual role that witnessed greater artistic control over a once, easily dispensable role. Dance scholar Pamyla Alayne Stiehl (2008) surveys the growth of the dance musical and asserts the choreographer's right to self-expression within their work, focusing on the rise of the 'Dansical', a revue production that surveys the canon of a specific choreographer. Stiehl asserted that the 'major dansical auteurs not only "master-weave" but also stitch their signatures prominently onto the tapestry' (2008: 57). Dance scholar Richard Kislan states that Robbins 'was the first successful director-choreographer to guide the commercial musical show in its journey from a writer's medium to a staging medium' (Kislan, 1987: 96). Similarly, theatre biographer Sam Wesson's recently published study of Fosse considered that 'Fosse's style and sensibility grew in the dark, and it hastened his thirst to control, to be the author of his own work and defend his artistic urges' (Wasson, 2013: 127).

It seems that musical theatre choreographers are alluded to in the auteur debate, but a serious critical study has yet to emerge. Whilst the director-choreographer diminished in the late 20th century, and only a few currently hold this dual role, the role of dance in musical theatre has continued to grow both in popularity and in its use as a narrative device to further advance the plot. Music scholar Mark N. Grant identified that despite the decline in director-choreographer figures there is now a legacy left to choreographers to allow for 'movement-based, visual storytelling, design-heavy premise of equal artistic merit' (2004: 213).

Whilst there is some ambiguity in the application of auteur theory, it is evident that the observer needs to fully immerse themselves in the body of work of the chosen director, choreographer and/or performer, to make an educated assessment of their stylistic traits. Sarris' outline will serve as a basis for the study of work however, film scholar Geoffrey Nowell-Smith provides an insightful, and digestible, rationale for its use:

> One essential corollary of the theory as it has been developed is the discovery that the defining characteristics of an author's work are not necessarily those which are most readily apparent. The purpose of the criticism thus becomes to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment a hard core basic and often recondite motifs. The pattern formed by these motifs….is what gives an author's work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another.
>
> (Nowell-Smith cited in Wollen, 2013: 62-64)

Interwoven in this investigation of authorship is the concept of adaptation, particularly in the transposition of films to stage which are examined in chapters 9 and 10. The following section considers the theoretical underpinning of adaptation. Chapter 8 explores the concepts surrounding musical theatre and its adaptive requirements, and builds upon the initial discussion here.

2.2.2 Adaptation and Theatre

Musical arranger and composer Lehman Engel stated that 'the history of musical theatre from the earliest times (opera, operetta, and the others) is also the history of adaptation' (1977: 74) and theatre scholar Olaf Jubin observes that existing novels provide a rich source for adaptations. This is primarily because the characters, situations, and structure already exist and the 'book's narrative drive can still propel the musical towards its final scene' (2016: 161). Jubin later explores the stage adaptation of the British film *Billy Elliot* (2005) suggesting that the adaptors need to ensure they remain faithful to the iconic moments in the film that remain etched in the memory of the public. Jubin also suggests that the average running time of a musical stage production is longer than that of film material. Opportunities exist for further creativity, within a live theatre performance, that additional running time allows (2016: 208), something that choreographer Peter Darling took advantage of by the way of more dance numbers on stage than were featured in the original film. Theatrical producer Margo Lion acknowledges that musical theatre has always borrowed from existing stories, citing Alan Jay Lerner's *My Fair Lady* (1956) and its source *Pygmalion* (1913) as a continuously staged example. However, in the 21st century 'stories today in the culture mainly come from films' (Lion cited in Chaikelson, 2006), such as *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (2005) and *Legally Blonde* (2007), explaining that during the 20th century writers looked at plays and novels as examples.

Adaptation is an integral part of life, but continually draws criticism for lack of originality. However, adaptation is a means by which life itself has evolved. In discussing the evolution of genetics in Darwin's Theory, scientist Richard Dawkins suggested:

> Fashions in dress and diet, ceremonies and customs, art and architecture, engineering and technology, all evolve in a historical tie in a way that looks like highly speeded up genetic evolution. As in genetic evolution though, the change may be progressive. There is a sense in which modern science is actually better than ancient science. Not only does our understanding of the universe change as the centuries go by: it improves.
>
> (1989: 190)

Lion's comments make a strong correlation with Dawkins' observations above, acknowledging that producers and writers have adapted and evolved to experiment with different media as source material. An element of inevitability should be considered in the process and use of adaptation within musical theatre and film. Both mediums have evolved throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, alongside the tastes and expectations of audiences. With media, available in a variety of different technological outlets, such as podcasts and live streaming on the internet, the demand in the creative industries has grown. Screenwriter Linda Seger made an important observation when discussing screen adaptations stating, 'it's important to remember that entertainment is show plus business, and producers need to be reasonably sure that they can make a profit on their investment' (1992: 4). The film industry has seen a significant increase in the number of remakes in recent years, along with the film franchises, such as the *Harry Potter* series, which has generated over $10 billion worldwide (Healy, 2013).

Foucault, in citing the work of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and gothic horror author Ann Radcliffe, ascertains the power of the author to create something more extensive than just words. Freud and Radcliffe established theoretical and literary concepts that later authors could further develop. Whilst adaptation theories get caught up in fidelity and originality (as discussed below), the very act of authorship provides a basis on which further authorial voices can contribute (1969: 114). This rationale incites a motivation for the very basis of adaptation to exist in the entertainment arena, beyond that of financial incentive. As with research in any subject, conditions and opinions change over time, thus enabling a process of re-visitation generates new knowledge and ideas based on existing concepts.

In *A Theory of Adaptation* Linda Hutcheon describes adaptation as:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work, or works
- A creative *and* an interpretative act of appropriation/salvaging

- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work
(2013: 8)

However, these explanations do not consider the changes in form that different performance arts require. Books, theatre and film all have differing needs in terms of adaptation. Literature can enable the reader to create their own visualisations of the places and characters within the novel, while theatre and film provide the visual pictures in their own interpretations, however film and theatre tell stories influenced, in part, by differing technology available to them. In film, scene changes can happen immediately and can switch back and forth, in theatre scenic changes take much more time. Literary scholars Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (2010: 12) proposed that any study of adaptation theory, specifically when formulating criticism around a work, should look not simply at the text (or in this case just the source material). Criticism should also consider the resultant trace of the original that is, in successful translations, evident throughout the entire adaptation. One of the paramount difficulties in transferring the medium of film to stage is the way in which each mode operates and the requirements of each medium. Film theorist Christian Metz (cited in Hutcheon, 2013:3) believed that film offers an opportunity for storytelling through visual images, therefore widening the scope and possibilities of adaptation. Part of the debates surrounding adaptations concerns the view on the genre of musical theatre itself. Hutcheon acknowledged that 'high' art forms such as ballet or opera receive acclaim and respect for their adaptation work (2013: 3), yet translations to film and stage do not attract such a positive viewpoint.

Film scholar Dudley Andrew (1984) proposed a three-part strategy for adaptation, suggesting the terms *borrowing*, *intersecting* and *fidelity of transformation*. He acknowledges that *borrowing* was a frequent feature throughout the history of the arts, implying that the audience was 'expected to enjoy basking in a certain pre-established presence and to call up new or especially powerful aspects of cherished work' (Andrew, 1984: 98). With *intersection*, Andrew identifies that any adaptation results in some form of change, due to the inherent mode of the

original source material. In the adaptation of a novel to film he proposed that 'they [films] present the otherness and distinctiveness of the original text' (Andrew, 1984: 98).

Andrew's last strategy concerned the *fidelity of the transformation*, and is the area that most concerns critics of adaptations. Literary scholar Thomas Leitch's *Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory* (2003), challenges the notion of fidelity:

> Fidelity to its source text – whether it is conceived as success in re-creating specific textual details or the effect of the whole – is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense.
>
> (Leitch, 2003: 161)

However, producers of screen-to-stage musicals are drawing on the audience's knowledge of the original source as an enticement to purchase tickets for the live theatrical event. It is here that the difficult juncture appears in adaptation theories which, to date, concern largely adaptations of novels to stage or screen. A novel entices the reader to take the time to absorb the text and develop his or her own visual picture of the event being described. Cinema is a multi-sensory medium that engages auditory, visual, and on occasion kinaesthetic awareness. The theatre involves *all* the above, and tempts the audience into the theatrical world allowing the further senses to become involved, so the adaptive snobbery that encompasses this theoretical concept needs an understanding of the audience requirements.

A film to stage adaptation surely must provide some familiarity to its audience, after all, is that not the reason that the audience have attended in the first place? Rebecca Ann Rugg (2002:51) suggests that 'the thrill of seeing live what was once on celluloid' is a powerful ally in recruiting audiences as the promise of faithfulness to the original source is a concept that theatregoers can identify with. In addressing originality, Leitch (2003: 161-163) identifies one of the difficult aspects of analysis in stage-to-screen adaptation is that, as in the case of *42nd Street* and *Singin'*

in the Rain, so much of the authorship is attributed to Berkeley and Kelly respectively. When iconic dance numbers are devised for the screen that allow for multiple camera angles and editing of the footage, there seems little sense in trying to re-create this for live stage. The stage has the advantage of being three-dimensional compared to the two-dimensional view of a film but is usually limited by the barrier of the proscenium arch.

Musical Theatre scholar Millie Taylor has examined film-to-stage adaptation in two recent publications (2012/2013). Her discussion on a 2009 production of *La Cage Aux Folles* (1983) considers the relationship of the audience and their motivation to see an adaptation on stage. Taylor supports adaptations because they 'produce an experience of co-presence at a unique moment, intimacy, cognitive empathy and emotional contagion' (2012: 131) as an incentive to push the creative outlet of musical theatre further. Taylor's examination of *Dirty Dancing* (2006) as stage musical similarly acknowledges the draw of a live performance as the audience engages with the narrative and its emotional content and have a 'greater degree of closeness to those emotions attached to the film, thus doubling the emotional attachment' (2013: 289). Both of Taylor's analyses provide a detailed examination of the relationship between the original source and the audience attachment, but do not consider the adaptive process from one medium to another.

Changing the medium ultimately leads to aspects of the source material not always being suitable for the newer rendering. The adaptation process often must condense the source material, resulting in 'losing sub-plots, combining or cutting characters, leaving out several of the many themes that might be contained in a long novel' (Seger, 1992: 2) because they do not work in a different performance mode. Hutcheon (2013: 58) similarly argues that the filmic source does not allow for the in-depth study of characters due to the inability to delve under the surface of the character. However, within musical theatre, this is something that becomes an essential component in the construction of character-driven songs, when the dialogue segues into

song, it is the music and lyrics that take over. For example, the compositions of composer Stephen Sondheim often become character studies, signifying the charaters internal thoughts at that precise moment. Joseph Swain, in his study of music in the Broadway musical, stated:

> The first association of a musical phrase with a character or situation carries over throughout the drama, and so not only the overt actions of the characters but also their thoughts and states of feeling become sensible to the audience. That is the rationale behind the leitmotif, a fragment of music that comes to represent a character or object of importance.
>
> (Swain, 1990: 4)

Musical theatre dance, particularly the work of de Mille, often examined the psychology of the characters which would not necessarily contribute to moving the narrative forward at that point, thereby giving an insight into the interior monologue of the character.

One of the most difficult components of fidelity is 'the spirit, to the original's tone, values, imagery, and rhythm' (Andrew, 1984: 100). One could argue in support of a musical adaptation, as the integration of song, text and dance become the means in which to address issues surrounding imagery and rhythm. However, issues of integration have long been problematic. Music scholar Geoffrey Block observes that composer Richard Rodgers 'often succeeded in making the songs flow naturally from the dialogue and express character' (2009: 206). Block continues to acknowledge that C*arousel* presented a 'unified musical score' (2009: 206) that enabled a cohesive blend of the narrative and the music. Theatre scholar Scott McMillin (2006) challenges the notion of integration suggesting that song and dance do not always further the plot since the book presents and charts the development of the narrative. Rather than further plot or characterization, the use of these performative techniques alter 'the mode of characterization' and most often repeat and reaffirm what the book has already outlined (McMillan, 2006: 8). McMillin also discusses his observations on de Mille's choreography within *Oklahoma!* acknowledging that the dance elements placed importance on divulging the inner thoughts of the ingénue character to the audience. While tackling delicate

issues for a 1940s production, the climax of the ballet jolts the audience back to the reality of the musical by allowing the text from the book to conclude the end of act one (McMillin 2006: 51). McMillin's ideas openly dismantle the long-purported ideology of integration in musicals (which is discussed in Chapter 3), namely that he does not deny the influence the song and dance components have on enriching the storytelling stating that 'the songs and dances intensify the dramatic moment and give it a special glow of performance' (2006: 52). Theatre scholar Gerald Mast's comments, almost twenty years before McMillan's, on the integration of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, make similar observations suggesting that the relationship between song and characterisation contributes to the integration of performance elements (1987: 294). Dance is mentioned in both analyses of the musical theatre canon, but neither fully examine the later work of Jerome Robbins and Bob Fosse, for example. De Mille may have successfully intertwined elements of classical and modern dance into the choreography in the 1940s, but later choreographers became conversant with the theatrical jazz dance form that was emerging throughout the 1950s onwards.

In terms of dance and adaptation, Berkeley and Kelly, as discussed in this thesis, were part of the creative forces that developed filming techniques and the mode of dance on screen during its early development. It is their very authorship of the visual work created on-screen that provides later adaptors with templates on which to develop ideas. In the case of both *42nd Street* and *Singin' in the Rain*, it is futile to ignore the contributions of Berkeley and Kelly in a recreation of the work because the very essence of the Berkeley's and Kelly's mise en scène provides an authorial voice beyond the dance content. The narrative, musical numbers, period, and characters are all entwined within the concepts that Kelly and Berkeley fashioned in 1933 and 1952 respectively. However, as authors in their own right, choreographers of the stage adaptations, Champion and Tharp, have the ability to take the basic structure and imprint their own stylistic stamp and embellish upon the existing material, their only limitations being the confinement of a proscenium arch stage and the narrative structure as dictated by the source

material. Darkin's acknowledgement of the natural phenomenon for human life and culture to adapt from its predecessors echoes Foucault's identification of authors as instigators of new work. Ignoring the concepts of fidelity, financial gain and artistic value, suggests that theatrical adaptation is no different to any other art form. As instigators, Berkeley and Kelly created models for filming and integrating dance into the film musical. Adaptations of these film sources is, as Hutcheon defines 'an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work' (2013:8), and provides validity in the re-interpretation and adaptation of existing material which is discussed in Chapters 9 and 10.

2.2.4 Dance for Film and Musical Theatre

Film scholar Jerome Delamater's 1981 *Dance in the Hollywood Musical* (based upon on his earlier 1978 PhD Thesis) remains the only full survey of dance on film. Delamater's research is significant in that it contains some of the last interviews with personnel from the studio system who are questioned with specific focus in dance and the camera. The research focus, beyond an historical overview of the genre, is aimed towards the cinematography, or filming, rather than of the dance content itself. The benefit of this reading lies in the ability to grasp a greater understanding of the filming techniques that are involved in dance for the film screen. As a result the reader gains insight into considerations that have an effect on the choreographic choices. Much attention is given to the work of Astaire and Kelly, who made significant contributions to the role of dance in the art form. Astaire, more than any other performer, has received much attention in writing, dance critic Arlene Croce (1972) and Mueller's (1985) studies are the most comprehensive of these. In Croce's writing dance analysis is evident, but attention is placed on the dramatic action and a critical analysis of how the dance contributes to this. Mueller's study is much more detailed and analyses each of Astaire's dance numbers from his film career, second-by-second, frame-by-frame. Whilst the descriptive text and critical commentary is

insightful and excellently detailed, it is apparent that an understanding of dance technique is lacking.

Dance scholar Beth Genné (1984/2001/2004) has focused on the work of Kelly and Astaire respectively, with her 1984 thesis exploring the relationship between Kelly, and directors Stanley Donen and Minnelli which examines the visual elements rather than the dance content. Genné's 2004 article examines the literal correlation between the spontaneity and acceptance of film characters to dance in the street with later commercial music videos. Genné's analysis shows a strong connection with the movement witnessed alongside the camera shots that assist the viewer in seeing the performance. Dyer and Mueller (2004) execute two separate analyses of 'Dancing in the Dark from '*The Band Wagon*' (1953). Dyer explores the relationship of Astaire and Charisse through the portrayal of heterosexuality in dance acknowledging that there is an alternating mode in the dependency of each character as the dance develops. Mueller explores the dance looking at the narrative progression within the piece and how the relationship between the two characters evolves as the dance progresses. The analysis of dance is in far greater detail in Mueller's observations and provides a greater insight into the development of the relationship and its contribution to the narrative element of the film. In contrast, history scholar Pamella R. Lach (2007) examines musical numbers, both song and dance, separate to their narrative placement to investigate their significance and influence on audiences in post-war America. Lach's analysis of Kelly considers his integration of art and technology to establish a body of work that allowed for limitless opportunities that contrasted with his off-screen projection of masculinity.

For a genre of film that is often given little value in film scholarship, beyond recognition of the visual and musical stimuli it provided, the wider audience for films still hold, and recognise, the value of movie musicals. Film scholar Richard Barrios stated when discussing the birth of the film musical 'much if not most of it can seem trivial, even as critics and theoreticians often wax elitist,

musicals somehow endure' (Barrios, 2010: 3).[2] This is an area that is also echoed by dance scholar Julie Malnig in her collection of dance essays, *Ballroom, Boogie, Shim Sham, Shake,* which collates many essays on social, popular and vernacular dance. Malnig observes the traditional periodization of dance studies neglected these forms, 'favoring instead the study of concert dance and well-known dancers and choreographers' (2009: 1). In citing the studies of performance scholar Brooks McNamara, Malnig raises the issues in the academic arena concerning what is considered "high art" versus "low art" forms of entertainment, as evdident in the limited focus on the popular dance idiom (2009: 1), something that is reflected in terms of musical film. These thoughts are replicated in the work of dance scholar Sherrill Dodds in her study of value in popular dance. Dodds suggests that the classification of performance works as a 'canon' does not appear until the works are celebrated in established institutions such as galleries or museums (2011: 18). The musical film suffers a similar fate, on a professional level the Academy Award is the revered prize of the annual award ceremonies, but the musical film has often been eclipsed in the most competitive of categories. Dodds states that:

> it is the serious endeavour of art dance that is awarded high levels of cultural value and, as several dance scholars reflect, the discipline of dance studies has perpetuated the hegemony of the canon.
>
> (Dodds, 2011: 19)

Whilst the MGM musical may not be viewed as "high art", its importance in the development of the film musical, as a genre, and in its later influence on musical theatre, should not be overlooked, or indeed undervalued. Music scholar Cari McDonnell observes that it was the MGM films of the 1950s that began to elevate the status of the musical film to be considered 'high art' through the integration of balletic and modern dance forms that were utilised by Kelly in his film ballets. Suggesting that if dance alone is not considered significant, then the addition of

[2] Following the growth of film criticism, with particular reference to the auteur theory during the 1950s and 1960s, despite its visual and stylistic value, the musical is not fully considered in writings of key authors such as Peter Wollen (1969) who only mentions the names of Busby Berkeley, Stanley Donen and Vincente Minnelli. John Caughie's (1981) collection of writings on authorship sees the musical ignored in terms of in depth discussion. It is Robert Altman's 1981 text *Genre: The Musical,* which really considers the genre in depth. See also the work of Altman (1987), Jane Feuer (1982, rev. 1993) and Steven Cohan (2002) for a more varied and cohesive investigation of various components of the musical film genre.

director Minnelli and his visual oeuvre in films, such as *An American in Paris* (1951), provide further evidence of the growth in the importance of musical films (McDonnell, 2014: 252-253). In terms of musical theatre dance, only Kislan (1987) and theatre critic Robert Emmet Long (2003) survey the breadth of dance in musical theatre as a whole. Kislan examines the development of dance through the genre, whilst Emmet's history is written through individual case studies of the key names in the Broadway musical canon. Studies by Robert D. Moulton (1957), Eugenia Volz Schoettler (1979) and Raphael Francis Miller (1984) remain significant for the depth and scope of the research during the early part of the twentieth century, particularly in terms of their discussions concerning choreographers whose stage work does not survive in any visual form. The date of the studies, as with those in dance on film, suggest a pique in interest during the same period, a time when nostalgia in film and theatre was at its peak, discussed in Chapter 8. Of note is the work of theatre scholar Mary Jo Lodge (2001) who provides a very detailed account of the rise of female director/choreographers. Her methodology utilises descriptive history and analysis to survey the subjects covered. The feminist approach focuses on gender issues surrounding an industry that has, for much of its existence, been dominated by men. The historical underpinning of dance sets the context of the writing in a clear framework and sees the development of these choreographers through a fresh approach. Stiehl (2008) surveys the rise of the 'dansical', what she describes as a 'hybrid of concert dance and musical theatre' (2008: iii), one of the few studies to acknowledge a more contemporary genre of dance in musical theatre. The study examines works of choreographers who exhibit authorial influence, and control, on the works created such as the musicals of Robbins and Fosse.

There is much potential for further investigation of dance in both musical film and musical theatre, and the following analysis in this thesis is underpinned by the theoretical frameworks discussed here. Since its inception, the transposition of the auteur designation from director to other creative roles allows for a wider examination in terms of the creative potential and influence

that both film personalities and choreographers have had in establishing a body of work associated with their stylistic tendencies. When the work of such strong visual stylists is then adapted to another medium, such as the stage, the web of authorship begins to get further tangled and is where part 2 of this thesis changes in focus. Part 1 will focus on the choreographic work of MGM choreographers who created a significant contribution to the development of dance in musical film.

Part 1:

MGM: Dance at the Dream Factory

Chapter 3: 'More Stars than there are in the Heavens': Musicals Great Musicals

To fully appreciate the development of dance in musical film, with specific focus on the films produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) during 1929 to 1957, an understanding of the how the studio system operated is key to establishing the wider context of musical film production. This chapter will survey the development, and ultimate decline of the studio system, and provide insight into the key figures involved in the creative processes behind the MGM film musicals. To consider the development of dance within the MGM musical, it is imperative to understand not only how the production of musicals was established, but how the studio paved the way for a variety of sub-genres of musical films within the MGM production units of producers Freed, Pasternak and Cummings. Appendix 2 provides a chronological overview of MGM musicals, with detailed information on directors, choreographers and the sub-genres as identified in this chapter.

Of all the film studios operating during the classical era of movie making, MGM has become synonymous with defining the Hollywood musical genre. Its slogan: 'More stars than there are in heaven' was coined by the publicity department during the 1940s as a declaration of its status as the reigning producing studio (Fordin, 1984: 51). The studio era, or 'studio system' as film historian Thomas Schatz (1998) defined it, refers to the production output of the major film studios from the 1920s to the late 1950s. In 1930, twenty-one studios operated in Los Angeles. Of these, five were considered the 'major' studios: MGM, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox, Paramount and RKO:

> The five major studios were the supreme powers in the industry, and each developed a distinctive production and market strategy relative to the number, size, and location of its theaters.
>
> (Schatz, 1998: 11)

Each of these five studios had a recognizable 'house' style, and in reference to their musical productions, became identified by the genre they produced. MGM was known for the lavish and spectacular productions that evoked operetta, Broadway adaptations, backstage musicals and original productions that pushed the boundaries of the film-making process.

3.1 MGM

The formation of MGM studios began in 1923 when theatre owner Marcus Loew purchased Metro Pictures and founded Loew's Inc. In 1924, Loew's Inc., purchased the Goldwyn Studios for $5 million and the production company of Louis B. Mayer for $75,000, officially establishing itself as Metro-Goldwyn studios. By the end of the year the new company was recognised as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Schatz, 1998: 29-32). Marcus Loew retired during the merger and operations in New York and the leadership of the corporate company was placed upon Nick Schenck. Film scholar Douglas Gomery stated that Schenck:

> made every important decision, from which films to make (by constant telephone calls to Mayer in the Culver City studio), to how to distribute MGM films, to which theatres to book MGM films, to what his Loew's theatres would book.
>
> (Gomery, 2005: 32)

Significantly whilst the studio created, financed and produced its annual quota of films, it was Schenk, a corporate non-creative mogul that ultimately had the final say and would exert control over what went into production at the studio.

In Hollywood at the Culver City lot, the vice-president and head of production was Louis B. Mayer, with his young protégé Irving Thalberg as 'Supervisor of Production' (Schatz, 1998: 31). It was Thalberg's responsibility to manage the production of all features that were produced by the studio, and he is credited with the introduction of some of MGM's leading players in the late-1920s to 1930's, including actresses Norma Shearer, Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford. Film scholar Janet Steiger (1985) defines this period as the ' central producer system' explaining

that the 'producer uses a very detailed shooting script, to plan and budget the entire film shot-by-shot' (Bordwell et al., 1985: 128), prior to any production being filmed. The 1930s are what Gomery described as the 'classic studio era' with film studios producing pictures to be distributed into its own chain of theatres. MGM was one of the largest studios, and corporations along with the other four major studios, that 'had three-quarters of the average domestic box-office take' (Gomery, 2005: 71). As MGM's star and dominance in the movie-making business ascended, Mayer developed the central producer system and assigned a growing unit of producers to the studio, including David O. Selznick, Hunt Stromberg and Walter Wagner.

By 1937 there were twenty producers on staff who oversaw the seventy pictures that were annually produced (Schatz, 1998: 254). This assembly line of producers created individual units that developed, devised and oversaw the production of the films that were produced during the 1930s and 1940s. In relation to the studios musical film output, there were three distinct units that operated during the 1940s and 1950s: The 'Freed Unit'[3] under the supervision of Arthur Freed, being the most creative in terms of pushing the musical genre forward. The 1950s at MGM saw significant changes in the production mode due to battling rising costs of productions, the advent of television, and mounting pressure from the government to no longer allow the movie studios to own chains of theatres, which monopolised the exhibition of each studios' pictures, something MGM managed to sustain until 1955. Mayer left the company in 1951 and a new production chief, Dore Schary, who had previously had a production unit at the studio, was appointed to manage the spiralling costs of the studio's output (Schatz, 1998: 459). Once a major player in the classic studio system, MGM's operational output consisted of independent producers who released films under the MGM banner. From 1969 until the present, the MGM name has been bought and sold to a number of larger conglomerates. During the

[3] The only reason that the 'Freed unit' is in speech marks here is because the name became synonymous with the musicals that were produced by this studio and throughout the history of musical films at MGM this is name that is referred to. Whilst the musicals of Cummings and Pasternak are also well recognized, they have not been attributed with such recognition.

1970s the lots on the Culver City Studio were demolished, the costumes, sets and props were auctioned and all that remains is the entrance gate and the soundstages and offices. (Gomery, 2005: 310)

3.2 Musical Film Genres

In the simplest of terms, Schatz defines genre films as those that structurally, in terms of characters and plots, follow a similar and somewhat predictable format. Genre films can be identified in terms of the musical, Westerns, gangster films and romantic comedies, for example (Schatz, 1981: 6). These films became a staple of the studio system and as Grant suggests were critical in 'establishing the popular sense of cinema as a cultural and economic institution' (Grant, 2003: xv). Whilst the roots of genre have stemmed from Aristotles' work *Poetic,* in which he identified different genres of poetry based on matter, subjects and method, it was not until the Renaissance period that these ideas were used to codify and identify different genres within literature (Buscombe, 1970, cited in Grant, 2003: 12). Film scholar Edward Buscombe suggested that whilst the identification of generic structures within the cinematic form is permissible, there are limitations in the original ideas that were utilised in the literary world. Buscombe raises caution in the identification of specific genres, as there is too much rigidity in observing that all Westerns show a similarity in plot. Whilst acknowledging there are some unifying features, this leads to a continual list of sub-genres (Buscombe, 1970, cited in Grant, 2003:14). Grant (2007: 11-14) discusses the relationship of genre and iconography, which draws upon the writing of art historian Erwin Panofsky who identified the symbolism and themes in Renaissance art. The idea of iconography works well with cinematic theories as its translation to the medium of film works closely with the mise-en-scène of particular genre films. Schatz utilises the idea further to suggest that iconography in terms of the genre film provides a 'value system' that characterises the 'objects, events, and character types composing it.' (Schatz, 1981: 24).

Whilst the focus of this study is not to debate the validity and application of genre as a theory, it is accepted that in order to examine the musical film genre comprehensively, sub-genres have been identified in order to establish the differing, yet familiar, traits that appear. In Altman's key text, *The American Film Musical* (1987), the notion of sub-genres in film musicals is discarded, as Altman suggests that previous attempts to identify sub-genres have resulted in 'producing categories that are totally unjustified theoretically' (Altman, 1987: 122). However, Altman acknowledges that the musical is a genre that has some of the most well developed sub-genres in film history, yet in many cases, one sub-genre often influences the next. Altman's rationale for defining a new approach to analysing the film musical explores the concepts of semantics, by way of looking for common traits and syntax, between each film. In short Altman identifies three sub-genres based upon this theoretical underpinning which are condensed in the list below:

- The fairy tale musical: to be in another place
- The Show musical: to be in another body
- The Folk musical: to be in another time

(Altman, 1987: 127)

The focus here, of identifying how each musical is coded, is based upon the romantic relationship of the characters dictated by the narrative. Even Altman contends that film musicals such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Mary Poppins* (1964) pose problems for this limited categorisation as neither film has a romantic plot, or even sub-plot, within the narrative structure.

Film scholar Barry Langford suggests that the musical film is the 'purest' of the film genres, stating:

> The musical seems unencumbered by any ongoing commitments to social realism, historical authenticity or for that matter any suggestion of performative naturalism.
>
> (Langford, 2005: 83)

Langford continues to discuss the musical in terms of defining and establishing its own rules and protocols that are plausible only in this specific genre. Discussed below are a series of sub-genres that become identifiable throughout the MGM musical canon. These represent a stable

of musicals and creative talent, that were a direct result of the production modes and values of the MGM studio system, and are still in current use within the wider context of musical film, and musical theatre.

3.3 Backstage

The backstage musical became the earliest form of sub-genre within the MGM musical canon, and throughout the history of film musicals is a theme that has given much mileage throughout the late 1920s to present day. However, it is not a sub-genre that has been particularly popular, or indeed successful, on the Broadway stage. The first 'full'[4] film musical premiered in 1929 entitled *The Broadway Melody* produced by MGM. The slim narrative concerns two sisters who graduate from the Vaudeville circuit to major Broadway musicals, a variation on the Cinderella story, whilst during the process familial, professional and personal relationships are tested. This formula, and the concept of 'putting on a show' whether in a theatre, nightclub, or via the filmmaking process, proved to be a winning formula and became the basis for many of the most popular and enduring film musicals from the classical era, it was also the first musical that won the Academy Award for Best Picture. Whilst MGM paved the way for this tradition, it was Warner Bros, and in particular the work of director Berkeley, that matured and refined this sub-genre in 1933 with the musicals *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Whilst these musicals only arrived four years later, much was improved upon in terms of filming techniques, and the understanding of how dance could be adapted for the camera. What is significant about these two musicals is their success during the Great Depression, providing audiences with both spectacle and optimism, yet both focus on the harsh financial struggles that the characters face in the process of mounting a musical theatre production. The musical numbers act as show-within-a-show pieces, with no song or dance presented unless the performers are in rehearsal or

[4] By full, I refer to the fact that the entire film featured sound, something that was not fully accomplished with the 1927 film *The Jazz Singer*, produced by Warner Brothers.

production. Whilst the integration of song and dance in musicals is discussed below in section 3.5, the backstage musical gave a framework in which audiences can accept that the performers are required to sing or dance without suspending belief in the narrative. Martin Rubin, in his study in the work of Berkeley, defined the backstage format as a format that:

> Allows for maximum isolation of musical spectacle within a narrative framework. It constitutes a distinct alternative to more integration-orientated[5] formats also popular in the period
>
> (Rubin, 1993:97)

Throughout the golden age of film musicals, the backstage format served as a template on which to develop the latest talent, filmmaking processes and choreography, whilst providing a perfectly plausible reason for the characters to break into song and dance. MGM produced a cycle of *Broadway Melody* films commencing in 1936, 1938 and 1940 respectively, centred on tap dancer Eleanor Powell and her characters' bid to either break into show business or with her already established as an entertainer.

Warner Bros. used the backstage format throughout the 1930s with success, although they became a somewhat predictable formula with Berkeley usually involved, a repertory cast that included Ruby Keeler, Dick Powell, Joan Blondell and Ginger Rogers, and with similar plotlines. MGM, whilst most often re-treading the same story concepts, continually created lavish and spectacular presentations with some of the biggest movie stars they had under contract including Astaire, Powell, Sophie Tucker, Judy Garland and George Murphy. MGM also devised a 'junior' version of the backstage musical coupling teenage film stars Mickey Rooney and Garland in a series of backstage musicals focusing on the younger generation of performers trying to break into the business. These coined the adage of 'Let's put on a show', perpetuating the myth that all it takes is talent and determination for a headstrong group of teenagers to

[5] The term *integration-orientated* is about the operetta musicals of Ernest Lubitsch and dance of musicals of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers which featured some early attempt to provide an integration of text, music and/or song, and where required, dance.

mount a large-scale Broadway musical. Significantly Berkeley, who moved to MGM in 1939, was involved in the direction or staging of all of these: *Babes in Arms* (1939), *Strike Up the Band* (1940), *Babes on Broadway* (1942) and *Girl Crazy* (1943).

Throughout the growth of the film musical, the backstage genre provided an overriding reason for musical numbers, or interludes, to exist. Feuer illustrates in her essay on self-reflexivity and the myth of entertainment, stating that the MGM musicals 'mediate a contradiction between live performance in the theater' (1977, cited in Grant, 2003: 469), engaging the plausibility of the audience recognising film is theatre. Feuer (1977, cited in Grant, 2003: 465) affirms that the backstage musical simply gives a reason for musical numbers to exist, and placates the audience by inviting them into seeing the growth of the final product first-hand. Most backstage musicals see rehearsal numbers throughout the greater part of the picture, only to be presented with the final product at the culmination of the film, thus inviting the audience to celebrate in the success of the assorted circumstances that may hinder the narrative prior to the *grand finale*.

3.4 Revue

The revue musical was based on the concept established in Broadway musicals through the early part of the 20th century, the most notable being the elaborate productions of theatrical impresario Florenz Ziegfeld. During the period 1907 to 1931 Ziegfeld presented yearly instalments of the *Ziegfeld Follies,* which featured a roster of established, or emerging, stars such as Fanny Brice and Eddie Cantor, both comedic singers that made the transition to Hollywood pictures in the 1930s. Due, in part, to the introduction of sound films, theatre audience interest waned and these once celebrated productions became extinct, coupled with the death of the Ziegfeld in 1931. As an entertainment icon, the musical revue was an important genre that, as theatre historian Gerald Bordman identifies, was popular from the mid-1890s to the mid-1950s

(Bordman, 1985: 3). The revue was tied to the development of popular American theatre music, which saw a decline due to the cultural shift in the 1950s to rock and roll and 'pop' music idioms.

Whilst MGM was trying to establish a model of musicals for film, like many of the other major studios of 1928-29, it experimented with the format in *Hollywood Revue of 1929* (1929). Barrios highlighted this flurry of activity in Hollywood, utilising a genre that had begun on the theatrical stage, stating that 'far more beholden to theater than soundstage, they [revues] have come to embody the dawn of musical cinema at its most archaic' (Barrios, 2010: 157). MGM had one over-riding edge on its competitors, its growing number of movie stars on contract, many of which were included in *Hollywood Revue of 1929*, irrespective of their musical talents. Despite its critical and financial success, and the competition from other studios, the revue musical was short-lived and paved way for more narrative driven musical films.

MGM re-visited the revue format in 1943's *Thousands Cheer* which, whilst a narrative musical, concluded with a large-scale revue featuring musicians and actors under contract, and a very lavish recreation of a Ziegfeld revue entitled *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946), which once again utilised the many talents under contract in a series of new sketches devised to emulate this Broadway influence. Whilst not interlinked with any form of narrative, the musical numbers are linked stylistically with the pretence of actor William Powell, portraying Ziegfeld, informing film audiences he wishes to present one last Follies production. This use of the revue format does not seem out of place, considering the number of musical entertainers contracted to the studio and the typical lavish productions that MGM became so identified with.

3.5 Integrated

The idea of the 'integrated' musical, in that the song, dramatic action and dance all work in harmony, has become a much-contested term in its application to musical theatre and film[6]. The term has been widely attributed to the theatrical work of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, with particular emphasis placed on their first musical production, *Oklahoma!,* due to its successful blending of the three elements to further advance the story. Kislan (1995) suggests that whilst earlier musical theatre work strived for integration it was not fully successful. He defined the term integration in relation to musical theatre as 'not only does every element fit perfectly into an integrated show, each functions dramatically to propel the book forward' (Kislan, 1995: 147). Bordman, whose compendium *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* charts the development of the Broadway musical from 1866 to 2000 suggests Rodgers and Hammerstein had featured some form of integration earlier in their work with other composers and lyricists, and that in the 19th century there were other instances of integration between the score and book (Bordman, 2001:589). In an earlier study of musical comedy, Bordman similarly highlighted that not only did integration coordinate with the book and score, but that the overall feel and stylistic presentation of the piece came together to form a unified style, an identifiable genre of musical theatre, and one that defined the writing of musicals for some twenty years further. Bordman questions the 'integration' of dance, with emphasis on balletic dance, and suggested that whilst it did not always further the plot, it became fashionable and a requirement that 'integration required ballet' (Bordman, 1982: 160). Theatre scholar Ethan Mordden described the reason for *Oklahoma!'s* success in the simplest of terms:

> From the twittering prelude and "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin;" right through to that joyous reprise of the title song for a finale, the story flowed in one straight line. It never bored. It never tried too hard or traded glitz for glow. It rolled.
>
> (Mordden, 1976: 190)

[6] As discussed at the 2014 Stagestruck Conference in Sheffield.

Block, in his chapter on integration in musical theatre, suggested the following five principles listed below, based upon his own interpretation of Rodgers and Hammerstein's viewpoints on the writing of a cohesive piece of musical theatre:

1. The songs advance the plot.
2. The songs flow directly from the dialogue.
3. The songs express the characters who sing them.
4. The dances advance the plot and enhance the dramatic meaning of the songs that precede them.
5. The orchestra, through accompaniment and underscoring, parallels, complements, or advances the action.

(Block, 2011: 98-99)

Whilst these five points are certainly identifiable within the Broadway musicals of the 1940s onwards, there is an overemphasis on the music, or more specifically the song. Dance is mentioned, but the seamlessness and relationship with the book, whilst acknowledged in points one through three, do not fully enable the writing and structure of the book to allow for these events to happen. Dance, as demonstrated in *Oklahoma!*, was able to continue to develop and enhance the themes of the musical and contribute to the development of characters and their relationships with one another.

Does there have to be a strong relationship between the writing of the dialogue and the lyrics in order to aid transition and flow? In the role of dance, what is it that dictates the integration? Is it the interpretation of the lyrics and subject of the preceding song? Or is it the attributes of the character or their internal dialogue, or is it just a relationship between what the music suggests in terms of movement? This appears to be the crux in the theoretical debates in the term integration: how literal does the interpretive scope of the choreographer need to be? Theatre choreographer Liza Gennaro believed that the:

> Musical theater choreographer's assignment is to negotiate and absorb the precepts defined by the time, place, and setting of the libretto, along with directorial choices regarding performance style and the physical elements of the production, and to discover how those elements translate into dance.
>
> (Gennaro, 2011: 45)

This also suggests that integration has to happen in the relationship between the director and choreographer, and their overall vision of the musical. Choreographer de Mille manoeuvred this in *Oklahoma!* by further exploring the inner emotions and psychological mind-set of the characters through the mode of modern dance, providing the audience with an internalisation of the characters' thoughts and feelings in order to elaborate and provide an additional development of narrative within the work. Gennaro stated that during this period 'de Mille caused an ideological shift in the function of dance on Broadway and opened on a fertile creative landscape' (Gennaro, 2011:51). It now seems remarkable that the work of de Mille paved the way for an endless opportunity for choreographers within musical theatre to utilise dance with far more depth and sophistication to anything previously presented on stage. Interestingly de Mille, and only a year later in the work of Robbins, brought a foregrounding in the classical ballet and modern dance idioms. It is this infusion, and perhaps creative background that injected a much-needed change to the importance that dance can play in musical theatre due to their abilities and knowledge of dance vocabulary. Whilst it is often recognised that George Balanchine successfully blended the classical ballet idiom with other forms of theatrical dance in the 1936 Rodgers and Hart musical *On Your Toes*, the musical scoffed at the 'high art' of the ballet world, diluting the seemingly high-brow world of ballet with humour for its audience. Balanchine choreographed over fifteen musicals between 1936 and 1951, but none of these had the impact of *Oklahoma!* on the development of dance (Gennaro, 2011: 48-49 and Mordden, 1983: 130-134).

However, existing dance history appears to ignore the developments in musical film and stage prior to 1943. Whilst the technical capacity of the camera and financial stability of the Hollywood studios afforded much larger scale productions numbers, specifically through the work of Busby Berkeley at Warner Bros, Berkeley did little to integrate the dance portions of the film into the narrative. This is an area film director Minnelli expressed concerns about upon his arrival in Hollywood in the 1940s:

> I wasn't impressed by Busby Berkeley's spectacular effects while at Warner Brothers….His devices were ingenious, but they bore little relation to the story or to the "reality" of the piece.'
>
> (Minnelli, 1975: 113).

Integration within the screen musical is somewhat problematic and receives short shrift throughout the early screen musicals, especially in those from MGM where dance generally does not serve a purpose, other than an extension of a song that leads into a dance such as the screen adaptations of Broadway musicals *Good News* (1930) and *Girl Crazy* (1932). The early film musicals are certainly reflective of the musical theatre at the beginning of the 20th century where the inclusion of dance represents nothing more than a visual interlude. Rubin, in outlining Berkeley's principles and his tendency towards dance as spectacle, rather than contributing to narrative development, makes a case to defend the idea of non-integration as a major element of the musical. Rubin suggested that if there is no continual conflict within the cohesion of the musical, the reason for music (and dance) becomes extraneous (1993: 13). What makes the musical interesting is the constant interchanging between reality and the acceptance from the audience that the characters can continue to convey the story, emotions or ideas through the use of song and dance. This does require a suspension of reality, and is a central issue as to why the musical becomes a somewhat moot point in critical studies. Why is there a need to justify the outbreak of song and dance? The musical is a form of entertainment that relies on the outpouring of song that externalises characters' feelings, which often develops into a physical expression that uses the mode of dance to further convey the message. Yet, there are many musicals that presented song and dance that bore little relevance to the narrative development of characterisation, but there is certainly a larger number of musicals that use this device as a method to develop the story and characters further. McMillin (2006), devotes his first chapter to the issues surrounding integration, highlighting the issues surrounding the expectation of an audience to suspend reality whilst a musical number happens. McMillin proposed that the real gift of musical theatre, in terms of developing the musical play during the 1940s was:

> that of turning Broadway's skill of song-and-dance routines into a new format in which the numbers had an important work to do because they were being inserted into a book as a different element, a change of mode, a suspension of the book in favour of music.
>
> (McMillin, 2006: 5)

This is the point where the MGM musical most succeeded in developing its own brand of integrated musicals that utilised the creative and performance talents to push the genre forward. This thesis is not concerned primarily with the contribution of music, yet it is important to briefly consider the function of music in relation to film and stage musicals. Music can develop and infer its own contribution to the narrative, as music scholar Nicholas Reyland suggests:

> There are moments, then, when music can be argued to narrate its own plot, with musical speech acts that put a spin on a musical tale.
>
> (2012: 58)

Similarly, the thematics of music can also dictate a narrative, or at least a conclusion, despite not being part of the film itself. Music scholar Ben Winters discussed the theme music from the *Indiana Jones* film series as an example, stating that when the character is in crisis, audiences, on hearing the theme music, are given the suggestion that the character will solve the current predicament, therefore aiding, and pre-empting the narrative before its visual conclusion (Winters, 2010:224). Whilst the films under discussion in both of these articles are not considered musicals, this draws a fine line between the musical genre and a film with background music in terms of how different levels of integration of the music works with audiences.

Astaire has been credited as paving the way for the integration of dance into musical film, through his series of 1930s RKO musicals starring Ginger Rogers. The plots of these films are thin, and very similar featuring a repertory cast of performers that each play the same character, with different names and relationships to Astaire and Rogers. What seemed to engage audiences was the chemistry these two dancers ignited between them when on screen, despite the lightness of the dramatic content of their nine films produced between 1933 to

1939; the relationships of their characters were always developed through dance. There is simplicity in this integration, as Schatz observed:

> The genre's most familiar romantic conflict – and in the musical, romantic relationships invariably are conflicted – involves a dynamic, spontaneous hero (generally a man, but occasionally a woman, as in *Living in a Big Way* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*), who compromises his uninhibited vitality when he falls in love with a talented, domestically orientated counterpart.
>
> (Schatz, 1981: 197)

It is this plot point that is featured through the narrative of most film musicals produced. What gives the musical variety is the range of music, and dances, that are employed to tell these stories. In her analysis on the work of Astaire and Rogers, Croce observed:

> Although Astaire and Rogers did many things in their movies besides dance – the way they looked and read their lines and wore their clothes and sang in their funny voices has become legendary, too, and they could make a song a hit without dancing to it – it was through their dancing that the public grew to love them and to identify their moods, and the depth of their involvement, and the exquisite sexual harmony that made them not only the ideal dancing couple but the ideal romantic team.
>
> (Croce, 1972: 5)

Croce's writing was the first published study of the work and contribution of Astaire and Rogers, but it does not fully evolve to consider their contribution in terms of artistic and stylistic development or, in fact, the ability for dance to serve, and integrate into, the overall narrative of the film. Praise or acknowledgement is given to their popularity and work on the screen, but then undermined with negative commentary on the substance and depth of the material they are given to work with. It is the work of Mueller (1984) that considers, in much more detail, the role that Astaire made in integrating dance in his film musicals. Mueller provided the following criteria in which to ascertain to what extent integration can be applied to the use of dance in film:

1. Numbers which are completely irrelevant to the plot
2. Numbers which contribute to the spirit or theme
3. Numbers whose existence is relevant to the plot, but whose content is not
4. Numbers which enrich the plot, but do not advance it

5. Numbers which advance the plot, but not by their content
6. Numbers which advance the plot by their content.

(Mueller, 1984: 28-30)

Mueller uses the term *numbers*, which unlike Block's categories earlier, opens the scope of analysis to include dance material and not just songs. In studying the MGM musicals, it is possible to position the musical numbers within this framework, no more so than in the films of Astaire and Kelly, who used dance as a means of expression to develop character and the romantic relationships that ensued, along with internal conflicts that may arise out of the narrative. Kelly's daughter, Kerry Kelly Novick, felt that her father also used dance as a socio-political statement within his work suggesting that:

> my father's work was working class, and provided a valid distinction between his and the work of Astaire. He wanted to express the notion of the underdog.
>
> (Novick, 2013)

It is important to consider the time frame in which the major developments of dance in the musical film and stage took place, towards the end of the Second World War. Throughout his early career Kelly is ostensibly linked to his patriotism through his characters that are servicemen, most commonly as sailors. Genné traces the appearance of the sailor in dance history as far back 1785. During the 1920s and 1930s, stage musicals often featured sailors as the central characters, and these were adopted by Hollywood during the growth of musical films (Genné, 2001: 89). Robbins first choreographed the ballet *Fancy Free* (1944) that he later developed with composer Leonard Bernstein and lyricists Adolph Green and Betty Comden, as the musical *On The Town* in 1945. Kelly was originally cast against type and played the womanising 'heel' character in the stage musical *Pal Joey* (1940) and in his first film musical *For Me and My Gal* (1942). In order to capitalise on his talent and warm audience reaction to his persona MGM quickly portrayed Kelly as a sailor in the 1945 musical *Anchors Aweigh* thus setting in place a common trait – the 'ordinary Joe' that just happens to dance when expressing emotion (Mast, 1987: 248). It is because of this patriotic association, that the growth of dance in musicals in

general (both stage and screen) has long been considered an altogether American contribution to the art form.

Feuer, when discussing the use of dance in the musical film, suggested that the preponderance of characters spontaneously erupting in to dance reflects, in her words, the 'folk musical', in which ordinary people are coerced into dance that becomes an extension of natural human movement (Feuer, 1993: 10). Whilst not using the word integration, this does imply the theory of the movement becoming integrated into the narrative as choreography, or in the words of Feuer: 'non-choreography', provides the illusion that every day folk *do* dance; whether it be to establish a resolution in the current narrative conflict, or as a further expression of that moment in time. In the work of Astaire and Kelly, dance is continually used to further the plot and/or character, hence integrating itself into the overall narrative of the piece. Whilst it becomes clear that the work of de Mille influenced the scope of dance on film, one only has to look at the use of the 'dream ballets' in the MGM musicals of Astaire and Kelly, in the films *Yolanda and the Thief* (1945) and *The Pirate* (1948) respectively, to see a filmic use of dance to further enhance the psychological aspects of the protagonists in the film.

3.6 Operetta

Operetta is a European form of entertainment that influenced the Broadway stages during the latter part of the nineteenth century into the early part of the twentieth century. Operetta is defined as a lighter form of opera, and together with its even lighter hybrid, comic opera, became a popular form of early musical theatre that rose to prominence in the 1920s, just before the coming of sound to movie musicals. Kislan defined the operetta form as offering:

1. A story with music that was more popular in tone than the music of serious opera
2. Spoken dialogue
3. Light subject matter

4. Comic interludes and,
5. A happy ending

(Kislan, 1995: 97)

It is considered the precursor to musical comedy[7] because of its adherence to some form of dramatic content and its integration of musical numbers to contribute to the development of the narrative. Barrios suggested that its appeal to American audiences was also signified by it being 'less daunting than opera, yet offering a semblance of culture in its trained voices, lyrical eloquence, and big choruses' (Barrios, 2010: 270). Its popularity was also justified because of the reputation of its composers, such as Franz Lehar, Victor Herbert, Rudolf Friml and Sigmund Romberg, who brought their European influences to the music, which gained popularity outside of the operettas in which they were first performed.

Due to the escapist qualities this genre offered, in terms of exotic locations and suggestion of opulence and indulgence, operetta became a staple of the movie studios experimenting with movie musicals during the early 1930s. However, MGM continued producing operetta films well into the 1950s. A far more specialised genre than others discussed here, the operetta musicals were filmed based upon the talents signed to the studio. Similar to the dance team of Astaire and Rogers at RKO, Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy epitomised the operetta film during the 1930s starring in The *Merry Widow* (1934), *Rose Marie* (1936) and *Sweethearts* (1938) all based on successful stage productions. During the 1940s, MacDonald and Eddy's popularity and careers were on a slow decline, but MGM continued to produce operettas. By the mid-1940s and continuing into the 1950s, MGM acquired other 'operatic' (in terms of singing style) singers such as Kathryn Grayson, Mario Lanza and Howard Keel, who appeared in musicals that followed the operetta format, such as *The Great Caruso* (1951), *The Student Prince* (1954)

[7] Both Operetta and musical comedy are intrinsically linked. Bordman suggests what differentiates musical comedy is its approach, sometimes cynical, to more contemporary settings than Operetta (1982: 4). Both Bordman (1982: 3-9) and Kislan (1995: 99-127) suggest that it is the change in musical styles that distinguish the two forms with musical comedy perpetuating the success of the American popular song.

and a remake of *Rose Marie* (1954). Like the dance musical discussed below, these sub-genres are more dependent on the talent on contract to the studio, rather than as a self-established model of musical films that began in the 1930s.

Film scholar Steve Neale (2000: 106) suggested that the significance of the popularity of film operettas, particularly the remakes of previously filmed productions, makes a significant statement in terms of their appeal to audiences, as operetta on stage was considered passé due to the evolution of the musical play and integrated forms outlined above. Altman classified the operetta as a 'fairy tale musical'; justified by what he called 'part of the charm of Viennese operetta [that] had always been its willingness to deal openly with society's favourite topic – sex' (Altman, 1987: 140). Some of the popularity of these plots, filled with innuendo and double-entendres, is particularly momentous during the early 1930s before the Hollywood production code was established and expunged any suggestion of sex. The later remakes incorporate the technological developments of film, but often lacked the risqué allusions that provided the light comic relief that had made them so significant on the stage.

3.7 Catalogue/Biopic

Catalogue and Biopic musicals provide an interesting solution to the debate about integration in musical film. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s these sub-genres provided a reason for characters to sing and dance, especially as many of the musicals were self-reflexive and about the art of entertainment. They also provided a secondary incentive for MGM; it allowed the studio to keep their stars under contract busy with guest appearances in various guises, often appearing in musical interludes showcasing a particular musical, or song, within the concept of a theatrical setting.

As early as 1930, MGM experimented with the dramatization of the life of singer Jenny Lind in the musical *A Lady's Morals* (1930), Lind was famed for her performances within the circus tents of showman P.T. Barnum. One of the most successful examples of the genre was based on the life of theatrical impresario Ziegfeld, and provided a fictionalised account of his life and the creation of these Broadway extravaganzas. *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936) afforded audiences the opportunity to re-live, or see for the first time in person, the many entertainers from his productions recreating their famous routines. One of the staples of the MGM brand was the genre of biopics celebrating famous American composers and lyricists: Jerome Kern in *Till the Clouds Roll By* (1946), Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers in *Words and Music* (1948), Harry Ruby and Bert Kalmar in *Three Little Words* (1950) and Romberg in *Deep in my Heart* (1954). Throughout these films, a cavalcade of MGM musical performers regularly appeared in a series of vignettes capturing the mood and style of the original presentations, albeit in the grandiose MGM style. Occasionally the numbers were taken out of context, such as Garland's two numbers in *Words and Music*, which whilst originally from the stage musical *Babes in Arms* (1937), are presented as two performances by the singer at a party of Rodgers and Hart upon their arrival in Hollywood. The narratives rarely aligned with the real lives of their subjects and situations were often derived to allow for song, but ultimately it is the songs and performances that make these films most remembered. The musical numbers may not be exact recreations of their stage counterparts, but they do give some flavour of theatrical history, especially in the presentation of some of Kern's earlier musicals from the 1920s.

The catalogue musical is something of a distant cousin to the revue genre. Whilst the material in a revue is not always coherently linked in terms of style of presentation, many revues contained the music and lyrics that were written by the same composers and lyricists. Catalogue musical films utilise the work of the same composer and lyricist (or time-period), but integrate the work into a contemporary narrative that has no relation to the context in which the songs were originally written. Four Freed unit musicals work in this manner: *Easter Parade* (1948), *An*

American in Paris, *Singin' in the Rain* and *The Band Wagon*. *Easter Parade* utilised the music and lyrics of Irving Berlin who also contributed new compositions of the film to augment the back catalogue of songs used. *An American in Paris* features the music and lyrics of George and Ira Gershwin concerning the life of an ex-GI, now street artist, played by Kelly. *Singin' in the Rain* is a comedic exposition of how Hollywood adapted to the changes during the sound era, once again featuring Kelly and incorporating the song catalogue of producer Freed and his partner Brown. Astaire starred in *The Band Wagon,* the title of which came from a 1930s stage production that featured Astaire and his sister Adele. The music and lyrics were by the team of Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz and were integrated into a new story that followed the transition of Astaire's character as a movie star who is trying to revive his flagging career by starring in a stage musical. Film scholar Steven Cohan linked the primary motive for the movie studios' understanding of star power and its influence on audiences to drive this sub-genre. Cohan stated that:

> The close affiliation of certain stars with their home studio helped to establish the company brand for product differentiation, so much so that the chronological history of the movie musical at a particular studio can be charted through its major stars.
>
> (Cohan, 2005: 12)

MGM was not the only studio that produced these sub-genres, but the studio certainly had one of the largest range of musical performers in its stable to utilise, and the publicity material for these films, in particular the biopics, aggressively pushed the list of actors and actresses that made appearances. As late as 1965, when the studio system no longer existed, Freed was still planning to produce a catalogue musical featuring the songs of Irving Berlin titled *Say it With Songs*. Despite a long creative gestation period (from 1962-1968) and various trade announcements, the musical never materialised and Freed left MGM in 1970. (Fordin, 1984: 518-524).

3.8 Dance

Whilst the dance musical is not an established genre in studies of musical film, it is identified by Ethan Mordden in his overview of the Hollywood musical (Mordden, 1981: 109-121). Despite discussing sub-genres in this chapter, there is not always a finite line in the boundaries of musical films. *Easter Parade* is part-catalogue musical, featuring old and new songs of Berlin, part-backstage musical as its narrative concerns relationships amongst a group or performers and part-integrated as the songs are written/chosen to develop the narrative into which they are inter-woven. However, it is also considered a dance musical because Astaire is the leading actor and employs dance as part of the narrative and character he plays, alongside tap dancer Ann Miller in her first film at MGM.

Mordden's rationale for the dance musical's inclusion as an identifiable sub-genre is because: 'besides editing and composition, style was discovered, the personal styles of Fred Astaire and Eleanor Powell that outmoded generalised choreography' (Mordden, 1981: 110). Whilst the earliest dance numbers on screen reflected the lack of knowledge of how to film dance, they also demonstrated little dance technique in terms of the many chorus girls[8] featured within a musical number. MGM developed a series of musicals around the talents of the dancers that they had under contract, usually dancers who had risen out of the chorus ranks, or were leading players on the Broadway or London stage.

The rise of the dance musical began tentatively in 1936 when tap and acrobatic dancer Powell was signed to the studio and featured in a number of backstage musicals showcasing her speed, skill and flexibility. Influenced by the Astaire and Rogers 1930s musicals, Kelly proved the biggest influence on the dance film at MGM by experimenting with the technological

[8] The term chorus girls is used to define the ensemble of dancers, all women, who were used as a device to fill the stage and frame the featured performers in the number.

advancements rapidly developing, and also utilising dance as a means to contribute and further the narrative. Schatz stated that:

> Kelly seems to be saying that escaping reality through music is not enough – one must refashion the existing world into a fantastic realm where dancing and singing are as natural as walking and talking.
> (1981: 208)

Astaire was brought out of retirement on two occasions to work at MGM and made a series of musical films that were heavily focused on dance as a key element to further enhance the narrative. Whilst many of these dance musicals are self-referential in terms of their story and characters, dance, post-*Oklahoma!*, became as an important a mode of expression as music and text, and a form of performance that MGM took full advantage of, more than any other studio of the period. The studio employed one of the largest roster of dance stars with Kelly, Astaire, Miller, Charisse, Leslie Caron, Vera-Ellen, Fosse, Tommy Rall and Bobby Van, to name a few. Other musical stars such as Garland, Rooney, Debbie Reynolds, Jane Powell, Betty Garrett and Esther Williams were also called upon to dance in their films. By the early 1940s the dance musical had become passé, Powell was the only dance star until Astaire and Kelly developed their careers at MGM. With the ascension of Kelly as a leading actor and creative force, the dance musical matured to feature more cohesive integration of creative elements, yet focus still placed on the dance components.

3.9 Americana

Whilst many of these sub-genres interlink, Americana is considered here as a hybrid genre of the integrated musical, and in part used as an example here of MGM's response to the success of *Oklahoma!* and the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein that reflect ordinary people and their struggles in life. Studio chief Mayer, despite some of the more outspoken members of the

contract players who paint a less happy picture of their dealings with the movie mogul[9], was determined to present films that catered to the audiences need for 'real' life and nostalgic returns to the utopian ideals of American life.

Starting with the film *Ah, Wilderness!* (1935), MGM developed a series of films featuring Rooney as Andy Hardy which centred around the Hardy family and the trials and tribulations of the protagonist character as he grew up (Schatz, 1989: 256). The highly successful series confirmed that there was an audience for family spun entertainment and this influence was evident in the development of musical films. Whilst 20th Century Fox led the field in musical films that focused on people at the turn-of-the century (particularly featuring stars Alice Faye, Betty Grable and June Haver), MGM created a succession of movie musicals that reflected both a bygone era and more contemporary settings reflecting the family values of the audiences.

One of the most successful of this genre is *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) featuring Garland and directed by Minnelli. Whilst there is some form of integration within the music and plot, others numbers are standalone entertainment pieces set at a house party with the characters singing and dancing within the scene, others such as 'The Trolley Song' and 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' help to set the mood of the current plot point. Schatz suggested that:

> Most post-1950 MGM musicals, in fact, created an integrated utopian community in which real-world concerns magically evaporated, in which performers and audience could mutually celebrate the liberating nature of romantic love and musical expression
>
> (Schatz, 1981: 220)

Significantly, most MGM musicals that celebrate Americana are during the period of the Second World War, and have a strong sense of focus on the importance of family and their relationships as a unit. Post-war musicals tend to be less about familial values as in *Meet Me in St. Louis* and

[9] The relationship with the movie mogul and his female movie stars can be read in the biographies of MGM musical film stars Ann Miller (1972), June Allyson (1982), Debbie Reynolds (1988), Jane Powell (1988) and Esther Williams (1999), who all have differing experiences and anecdotes concerning their relationships with Louis B. Mayer.

Summer Holiday (1948), and more to do with people and their romantic relationships in films such as *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949) and *Summer Stock* (1950). The production units of Pasternak and Cummings feature more of the musicals in this sub-genre than those of the Freed unit. There is a simplicity in these musicals that often gets overlooked for being pure 'corn' as opposed to more serious film musicals ripe for analysis. Whilst the self-reflexive musicals, such as *The Band Wagon* and *Singin' in the Rain*, focus on the business of show business, there is still an element of Americana and family values imbedded into their light narratives.

To elaborate on the further workings of the studio system it is necessary to understand the formation of MGM and establish the rudiments of its house style and sub-genres of its musicals. As this chapter has identified, there is not always a clear division in the assignment of sub-genres to films, and from the 1940s onwards, there is much cross-over amongst the genres. In part, this is due to the creation of the 'Freed Unit', which drew together a team of creatives that shaped the future of the MGM musical. Whilst certain members of this elite production unit were hired solely for their skills in composing and designing, people such as Kelly, Walters and Donen proved adept at a range of differing production roles and therefore integrated these talents into the films they were assigned. Similarly, performers who may have been contracted for a specific skill would often have to demonstrate versatility such as Charisse who was contracted as a ballet dancer but would showcase a wider range of abilities in her later films. This move towards a wider talent pool of musical artists resulted in films that, first and foremost, projected to audiences why MGM was one of the leading studios in producing film musicals.

In continuing the examination of the inner-workings of the studio system the next chapter will explore the development of film choreographers during the early period of musical films production.

Chapter 4: 'Born to Dance': Early Choreographers at MGM

This chapter examines the development of the early choreographers at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The first section will highlight the lack of recognition choreographers faced in terms of union representation and from the Academy Awards, whose awarding category for Best Dance Direction was only bestowed for three years from 1935 to 1937. The second section focuses on the work of the early choreographers in Hollywood and the development of theatricalised forms of dance on screen. The on-screen work of choreographers Sammy Lee, Bobby Connolly, Dave Gould, and Robert Alton represents a growth in developing choreography for the camera. Charles Walters and Stanley Donen are omitted in these chapters primarily because of their ascension in the ranks to Director. Walters and Donen both received choreographic credit in film, yet their work is more focused on musical staging than a discernible dance style, both would achieve far more recognition for personal style in terms of their film direction. Albertina Rasch, the only female choreographer to maintain a choreographic career in early film is not included in the analyses for several reasons. First and foremost, her choreography centred mainly on her own dance troupe and not on individual film stars. Secondly, much choreography in these early films concerns the placement of extras in ensemble numbers or dances that were deleted from the final print. Of Rasch's contribution to dance on the screen, dance scholar Frank W.D. Ries states:

> … she was probably the finest choreographer of the operetta genre and of the historical dramas that flourished during the 1930s. She also had an uncanny understanding of how to choreograph for the camera, whether it be a solo waltz by a star or a group of two hundred dancers. And she was able and willing to make the dance subservient to the total picture, which is probably why she was so respected by contemporary producers and directors.
>
> (Ries, 1982: 347)

Rasch, as a female choreographer in a male dominated Hollywood is significant, but her subservience to the picture as whole would ill-serve the dance content as it became extraneous

to the plot. Later choreographers such as Pan, Kidd, Loring, Cole and, actor-dancers such as Kelly and Champion, will be discussed Chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

Examinations of the choreographer as auteur are few and far between, with Fosse and Robbins the most prominent names (Wasson, 2013, Jowitt, 2004). However, both Fosse and Robbins established themselves as Broadway veterans taking on the dual role of director *and* choreographer. By the 1970s, Fosse had proved himself as a prominent instigator in all creative decisions both on stage and in film. Whilst the assignment of authorship has gone beyond that of the director, as discussed in Chapter 2, the role of the choreographer as auteur remains somewhat mute. In her study of choreographic practice performance scholar Bojana Cvejić (2015) relates authorship and choreography to the French discourse *danse d'auteur*. In this instance Cvejić suggests that the choreographer's authorial voice is found through creating solutions to problems rather than an emphasis on 'individual taste, freedom of will, memory and a sense of self' (2015: 66). To that extent, Cvejić proposes that the choreographer is the architect in designing the dance, but is not the single factor in the creative development process. The suggestion here is practical in terms of collaborative arrangement between the dancer and the choreographer, which in some instances of the studio system would be the case such as with Pan and Astaire. In the early years of the studio system dance directors generally choreographed for large ensembles of dancers as there were few films stars who were primarily dancers other than Powell and Astaire. Yet these early choreographers possessed a uniform style that will be examined in the analyses below. Dance scholar Anthea Kraut, in her survey of choreography and copyright, raises the issues of ownership in relation to African vernacular dance and later social dance forms of the early 20th century. These dance forms, along with tap dance, developed their vocabularies through sharing, and sometimes stealing, steps between performers. Kraut uses Lindy Hop dancer Frankie Manning as an example who stated that 'we never thought about who created this or who created that' (Manning, cited in Kraut,

2016: 151). This chapter is not ascertaining ownership of material, however the borrowing of steps is endemic to tap and jazz dance genres whose roots stem from social dance forms.

From the dawn of the sound-age, Hollywood musical films relied on choreographers to stage the musical numbers for both the star performers and the large ensembles that populated the vast film soundstages. This chapter examines the role of the choreographers in the Hollywood production system, the earliest of whom were already proven Broadway choreographers. The choreographers mentioned here are little remembered today in the wider dance community and have received scant scholarly attention in the ensuing years. This chapter is structured chronologically and choreographers are selected on the significance of their creative contributions and frequent involvement in MGM musicals during the 1920s to 1950s, and offering a historical overview of the development of dance in film. The title choreographer, alternating with that of Dance Director, is discussed due to the lack of consistency in the terminology applied to choreographers in film musicals.

4.1 Choreographers in Hollywood

In a memo dated February 9th 1955, MGM film producer Cummings wrote to Charles Brackett, President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, requesting that the Academy Board reinstate the Oscar award for Best Dance Direction, following the release of MGM's 1954 picture *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, choreographed by Kidd. Cummings wrote:

> I am aware that the Academy has discontinued giving an Oscar for the best choreography. I know this because I took this matter up with Johnny Green, who so advised me, and also asked me to lay my problem before you as the President of the Academy.
>
> Can I persuade you to persuade the other members of your Board to please reinstate the choreography award this year? I think it would be tragic if the academy were to pass up, this year, the opportunity of paying tribute to a most remarkable young man who has given such

> force and meaning to choreography and its integration into the motion picture.
>
> (File 60)[10]

This memo raises two pertinent points: firstly, the last time the award for dance direction had been given was 1937, after only being awarded for three consecutive years (Oscars.org). Secondly, Cummings specifically refers to the word 'choreographer' as opposed to dance direction. Throughout the MGM musical canon, there are very few references to 'choreography by' in the opening credits sequences. Kidd's billing was listed in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* as 'Dances and Musical Numbers Staged by' and makes no mention of the term choreography. In an inter-office memo, dated 24th January 1957, from MGM legal executive Ray Monta to MGM producer Freed, the correct billing of the choreographer on the title sequence of a film is raised. Concerns highlighted that the wording on the title card could potentially lead audiences to believe that the choreographer was responsible for the writing of the songs, which in the case of *Silk Stockings* (1957) was credited to Cole Porter. Monta writes:

> …Mr. Cole Porter, could object or resent the use of language for the choreographers "Musical Numbers Created and Staged by" as implying that these people had anything to do with the very writing of the musical numbers.
>
> (1957)[11]

Monta offers a list of standard wordings used to credit the work of the choreography, variations of which include:

- Dances and Musicals numbers created and staged by
- Musical Numbers and Dances staged by
- Musical Numbers staged by
- Choreography by

(1957)[12]

[10] Jack Cummings Papers, Margaret Herrick Library
[11] *Silk Stockings* Production Files, Box 21, Folder 1, Arthur Freed Collection, USC
[12] *Silk Stockings* Production Files, Box 21, Folder 1, Arthur Freed Collection, USC

Once again, the term choreography appears, yet there is no consistency in its application. In fact, the only dance director listed with the title choreographer is Kelly, for his work on *An American in Paris* and *Brigadoon* (1954).

Debates over terms such as 'dances staged by', and 'choreography by', have a long-standing history within the politics of film production in Hollywood dating to beginnings of the sound era, and is worth pausing here to consider further. The status of the dance director in Hollywood had a lasting consequence for the recognition and protection of choreographers throughout the golden age of the Hollywood musicals. According to film dance historian Larry Billman, the Screen Director's Guild of America refused to acknowledge the term 'dance director' and would not accept that audiences would be drawn to pay to see a film because of the featured dances (Billman, 1997: 57). The lack of union recognition is an issue that remains in the 21st century, only those choreographers that also directed, namely Kelly, Walters, Donen and Fosse could become members of the Director's Guild of America (DGA) union.

Many dance directors were imported from New York to Hollywood. Kislan states that the dance director's purpose was to hire and teach an ensemble of dancers, and create imaginative dance routines to support the leading players of each production (1987: 41). Dance directors of the early twentieth century relied on the existing dance vocabularies of popular social dances of the period, the Charleston and the Varsity Drag were inspired by African American vernacular movement. The speciality acts of dancers on the vaudeville circuit included novelties such as Legomania, a style that drew attention because the dancers seemed to have 360-degree rotation in the hip sockets, as in the case of dancer Charlotte Greenwood. Eccentric dancing introduced comedic tap dancing as was the style of Ray Bolger and Buddy Ebsen.

Ned Wayburn (b. 1874-d.1942) was one of the most prolific and successful theatre dance directors during the early part of the twentieth century. His 'routines' followed a formula:

> The average routine consists of ten steps, one to bring you onto the stage, which is called a traveling step; eight steps to the dance proper, usually set to about 64 bars of music or the length of two choruses (i.e. refrains) of a popular song; and an exit step, which is a special step designed to form a climax to the dance and provoke the applause as you go off the stage.
>
> (Wayburn cited in Stratyner, 1996: 6)

Wayburn classified five types of stage dancing that he specialised in:

1. Musical Comedy Dancing
2. Tap and Step Dancing (Clogging)
3. Acrobatic Dancing
4. Exhibition Dancing (Ball-room)
5. Modern Americanized Ballet Dancing

(Wayburn, 1925: 45-83)

The first category is labelled as an 'exaggerated form of fancy dancing', and refers to a combination devised of the above requirements (Wayburn, 1925: 33). Whilst Wayburn's 1925 manual *The Art of Stage Dancing* was surely considered a landmark in outlining the methodology of a theatrical choreographer, there is a derogatory perception placed on the use of the dance during early musical theatre that is eluded to be 'the kind of dancing that one can commercialize' (Wayburn, 1925:14). It would take a further eleven years before the status of dance was elevated to have more significance. In examining the status of tap dance from its earliest vernacular development, Dodds states that it is only when these 'popular' forms of dance became theatricalised that they are situated 'within a set of discources traditionally applied to high art.' (Dodds, 2011:53). Similarly dance scholar Barbara Cohen-Stratyner, in an examination of social dance in early Broadway musicals, identifies that the status of theatrical dance was elevated once it reached the mass population of the American audiences. Cohen-Statyner states that 'people attended cabarets and Broadway revues to learn new steps, rhythms, and gender politics' (2009: 231).

The earliest dance directors, such as John Tiller, Rasch and Chester Hale focused on precision dancing, which emphasised the uniformity and discipline of the dancers to remain in complete synchronicity with each other. It was not until 1936, with the premiere of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart's musical, *On Your Toes,* that the term 'choreography by' was first employed on the posters advertising the show. The choreographer for this musical was George Balanchine, a former dancer and choreographer with the Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and eventual founder of New York City Ballet. Balanchine, along with many leading Broadway dance directors including Berkeley, Connolly, Lee, Rasch, Alton, Seymour Felix and LeRoy Prinz, made the move to Hollywood to reproduce their musical staging for the camera. Billman states that the term dance director was given because 'they adapted, directed, and staged the choreography which already existed' (Billman, 1997: 28). Many of these dance directors did not actually dance, they would stage the routines, and often an assistant would devise the actual steps.

In my interview with MGM contract dancer, Sylvia Lewis[13], she remembers some of her experiences working with the many dance directors who had limited technical knowledge of the dance genres. Lewis states:

> When I think of the backgrounds and degree of dance knowledge that the choreographers that I worked with, the differences in them was so huge. Those first couple of choreographers I worked for had been theatre choreographers. Some of the guys like, Al White and Jack Donohue, they were left over from vaudeville. LeRoy Prinz, these were the dance director days before choreographers per se, and their knowledge was so limited and so reflective of that era before them, which was vaudeville, minimal requirements. Just pretty girls lined up.
>
> It was unbelievable and very hard for me because I was so well trained and when I first started working for people like that I couldn't quite believe that this was it. When doing *She's Working Her Way Through*

13 Sylvia Lewis started her career working in Vaudeville in Baltimore. She began her career in Hollywood as a dancer working for many of the film studios, such as MGM, Warner Brothers and Universal. Lewis worked with Gene Kelly twice on *Living in a Big Way* (1947) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), later working alongside Roland Petit in *Hans Anderson* (1956). Her later career saw her become the regular dance partner of Ray Bolger and choreographer of *The Ray Bolger Show* on television. She continues to keep her presence through her own website www.sylvialewis.net and her own YouTube channel.

> *College* [1952], Prinz was a renowned choreographer but he asked us to do the most simplistic movement.
>
> (Lewis, 2013)

Dance directors, such as Jack Donahue and Prinz, were some of the busiest at the studios during the 1940s and early 1950s.

Echoing the status of the choreographer, a wider lack of recognition for dancers throughout Hollywood was evident, as dancers under contract to the various producing studios were only able to join the Screen Extras Guild union. Dancers would often go from auditions at the various film studios to rehearsing and filming dances in a short space of time. In remembering her career as a young dancer looking for work in Hollywood, Lewis often rehearsed and filmed numbers in one day. As contract dancers were paid on a daily rate, it was a shrewd move to keep production costs at a minimum. Lewis stated:

> We were Screen Extras Guild, and always were the lowest of the low. There were so many films on which I worked for which I have no recollection because we would go for an audition. We would call central casting, under the guidance of Screen Extras Guild as atmosphere people and would be sent to an audition. You'd come in the next day and be sent to wardrobe, they get you a fitting, they set a number and shoot it the next day and you were gone. I don't remember those pictures, I don't remember those people.
>
> (Lewis, 2013)

Another contract dancer, Fred Curt, had a very different experience. An export from the Broadway stage, Curt worked at several studios with choreographers Kelly, Kidd, Pan and Gower Champion to name a few. Several of the films he worked upon ran for 'several months of rehearsals, filming, and re-shoots which meant I was as stable as a dancer could be in films at the time' (Curt, 2015). Curt's films included *Seven Brides For Seven Brothers* and the screen adaptation of *Carousel* (1956).

Many of the MGM choreographers credited on screen would draw little recognition, other than from spectators with some insider knowledge of musical film history. Beyond the benefits, such

as welfare, health assistance and the guarantee of screen credit, the point at which choreographers were denied a union affiliation marks a significant juncture in the pathway that crosses between Broadway and film musicals. As history scholar Michael Denning highlights in his study of unions and the culture industry in America, the 1930s saw the growth of The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the Screen Writer's Guild (SWG). These powerful forces protected their members and in 1945 the SWG staged an eight-month strike to obtain better rights for screenwriters that significantly impacted film production (Denning, 1997: 89).

In contrast since 1947, at the inaugural event of the Antoinette Perry Awards, more commonly known as the Tony Awards which honour excellence in theatrical work in New York, nominating members have voted to acknowledge the achievement in choreography on the Broadway stage (www.tonyawards.com). In 1959, the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society was founded to represent, protect and serve members who are involved in theatrical productions throughout the USA. A 1962 memo found in the Bob Fosse-Gwen Verdon collection at the Library of Congress, outlines the payment structure for choreographers of first-class (Broadway and National Tours) productions. The choreographer was to receive no less than $1500 for the initial production and hitherto was entitled to a minimum of 1/3 of 1% of the gross box-office receipts. The weekly gross would vary considerably depending on the success of the production. In comparison, a director would receive $2500 for the production and ½ of 1% of the gross, a director of a play would receive 1% of the gross as there are less creative members that are entitled to a share of the weekly gross[14] (1962)[15]. Choreographers such as de Mille, Robbins, Fosse and Champion, have long been recognised by the theatre-going public as influential contributors to the development of direction and choreography on the Broadway stage and have been awarded professional recognition annually. The foundations of Hollywood dance directors were built upon the ideas established by Broadway choreographers, yet many of the

[14] As of 2017 $1500 would now equate to $12,158 and $2500 to $20,263.
[15] Bob Fosse and Gwen Verdon Collection, Box 51A, Library of Congress

names of early choreographers have long been lost beyond scholars and admirers of musical films.

The lack of union support to protect the financial matters of dance directors is also reflected in the significant absence of parity in the salaries whilst working on film productions. Few choreographers were ever signed to a long-term contract, they would mostly be contracted per picture either with a set fee or a flat weekly rate guaranteed for a specified amount of time. For example, on the Minnelli musical *The Band Wagon*, Kidd was hired from Broadway as the choreographer. Kidd was contracted for a 15-week guarantee of $1500 per week, and additional work would be paid at ⅙ of the weekly rate per day which equates to $250 a day (1953,)[16]. Of interest is the variance in the weekly rate of pay for contract dancers, who like the dance directors, did not have a designated union through which to control members benefits. A contract dancer could start at between $125-$150 per week, increasing to $250 per week if considered to be a specialty dancer (1953)[17]. On this production, Alex Romero, Kidd's assistant dance director is a dancer and later choreographer who was on a contracted fee of $250 per week. On the 1949 production of *On the Town,* Kelly, who also starred, was paid a director's fee of $59,333, whilst his collaborator Donen was billed as Co-director and dance director on a significantly lesser fee of $12,000. Only three years later, on the production *Singin' in the Rain,* Kelly and Donen were both listed as co-directors and choreographers equally netting a fee of $30,000 each, which considering the growing status of Kelly is not particularly reflected in the salary. (1949 and 1952)[18].

Silk Stockings is one of the few musicals of the Freed era to feature two separate choreographers. Pan, who choreographed all the numbers featuring Astaire, signed a contract

[16] *The Band Wagon* Production Files, Budget Reports, Arthur Freed Collection, USC
[17] *The Band Wagon* Production Files, Budget Reports, Arthur Freed Collection, USC
[18] *On the Town* and *Singin' in the Rain* Production Files, Budget Reports, Arthur Freed Collection, USC

with a 15-week guarantee of $2000 per week (1957)[19]. Loring, who was responsible for the staging of all other numbers featured in the film, was contracted for a 15-week guarantee of $1000 per week. Whilst Pan had been an established choreographer since the early 1930s and was the last recipient of the Oscar for Best Dance Direction, these figures represent a significant variance in the rate of pay. The amounts pale in comparison when a studio is willing to pay $250,000 for the production rights to film *On The Town,* or $200,000 to use the services of composer Ira Gershwin on the film *An American in Paris* and $90,000 for the music publisher's rights and use of the title (1951)[20].

Nonetheless it seems that lack of industry recognition and safeguarding with union representation, was detrimental in developing a wider appreciation and awareness of distinguished choreographers who changed the dance landscape in film musicals. Berkeley, Walters and Donen are names known in the film community, yet they began as choreographers, they are more celebrated and recognised as directors and were active members of the DGA. Donen's early work was in collaboration with Kelly during the late 1940s and early 1950s, yet little acknowledgement is given to his solo work as a choreographer.[21] Prohibition around union representation seems at odds with the cultural development of the arts during this period. The growth of the film industry in the early 1900s saw a significant change in popular entertainment, namely Vaudeville and Burlesque, often considered 'low-art', leading to mass-production during the 1920s onwards to become one of the most popular and successful forms of entertainment globally (Denning, 1997: 39-40).

[19] *Silk Stockings* Production Files, Box 21, Arthur Freed Collection, USC
[20] *An American in* Paris Production Files, Box 1, Arthur Freed Collection, USC
21 Film scholar Joseph Andrew Casper (1983) provides the most informative survey of Donen's early career in Hollywood and his contribution as a choreographer. Donen met Kelly on Broadway and relocated to Hollywood in 1942. Through his working partnership with Kelly, Donen worked on several Columbia pictures before choreographing several 'B' pictures at MGM, often going un-credited. Casper acknowledges that his collaboration with Kelly on the Columbia film C*over Girl* (1944) marks the start of Donen's signature: 'the pally threesome, the gospel of joy, and expansive geography – which necessitated the removal of a wall between two stages.' (Casper, 1983; p10). It is a trademark that would be repeated through all of the Donen-Kelly pictures at MGM.

Having established some of the conditions, including those of employment and lack of recognition for the film musical choreographer, it is now possible to consider some of the most prominent choreographers in the field. The following section analyses choreographers' contributions and stylistic qualities developed in musical numbers. The first four choreographers discussed in this chapter represent an overview of the earliest dance on musical film work. Lee's work is the closest example available of the Broadway dance directors; the choreography is formulaic, repetitious and demonstrates a lack of understanding of how to film dance, and dancers, for the camera. Connolly and Gould, arriving only a few years after Lee, demonstrated the significant advancements made in filming dance on screen. Much of their work on film featured a film star that danced (and often choreographed their own dance numbers), so Connolly and Gould's creative output is often relegated to the staging of the ensemble dancers who execute simplistic movement that does not detract from the featured performer they are framing. Appendix 1 provides a glossary of dance terms that have been utilised within the following analyses.

4.2 Sammy Lee

Lee (b. 1890 – d. 1968) was one of the earliest choreographers to make the transition from Broadway to Hollywood, choreographing musical numbers for MGM films from 1929, starting with the revue picture *The Hollywood Revue of 1929,* until 1947 with his last contributions on screen in *The Unfinished Dance*. He was nominated for the Academy Award twice (in 1935 and 1937) yet Lee's contribution to dance on screen receives scant mention in historical overviews of film musicals.

Lee was self-taught and began his career as a vaudeville performer, which led to work on the Broadway musical *The Gingham Girl* in 1922 (Billman, 1997: 286). During the 1920s Lee established himself as a major Broadway choreographer and became a prominent name linked

with theatrical productions of Ziegfeld. Lee's many notable productions include *Lady, Be Good* (1924), *No, No Nanette* (1925) and *Show Boat* (1927). Moulton ascertains that Lee's dances were identified as 'fast in tempo and difficult in technique.' (Moulton, 1957: 41). Much of the dancing on the Broadway stage during this time represented precision line routines with chorus girls in unison showing no individuality, Lee is credited with pushing his dancers' technical expertise. Lee described his audition and working process:

> Instead of engaging dozens of girls, I signed up with a sparse group numbering only eight. But these I trained as intensively as if I were instructing an army. So by the time I was done with them, each one of the girls, even though she was in the chorus, was a distinct personality with a place of her own in the show. I taught her every conceivable kind of dance step, and then such acrobatic stunts as only a circus athlete could do – splits, cartwheels, flip-flops.
>
> (Lee cited in Moulton, 1957: 42)

In surveying Lee's career, Ries' (1986: 1-83) description of his other Broadway musicals indicates this method did not continue as later stage productions featured the generic formulas as outlined by Wayburn. Ries stated that Lee's Broadway career, whilst significant, 'cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called innovative.' (Ries, 1986: 84) What made Lee so important was his ability to use the formulaic choreographic styles outlined above better than any other choreographer, most significantly because the productions he was employed on were considered among the most superior musicals of the 1920s in terms of financial and critical success.

Lee was contracted to MGM in 1928 and choreographed two dances, 'Broadway Melody' and 'The Wedding of the Painted Doll', for the first all-talking motion picture, *The Broadway Melody*. Despite the choreographer George Cunningham receiving credit, Lee was engaged to re-choreograph two musical numbers without receiving any screen credit (Ries, 1988: 145). 'Broadway Melody' is presented as an on-stage rehearsal featuring Charles King introducing the song before the chorus girls enter from stage left executing a grapevine step with a high front kick. The women then split in the middle so that each half of the line faces towards centre stage to allow them to do a *box step* around each other with the hands on the hips. Once they

have crossed, they walk back to their original positions. The dancers and the male singer commence a series of *time steps and break* shifting the accent of the tap steps to the count of eight, which leads into a *Susie* Q and break combination. The next phrase of movement sees the girls rotate to face the back of the stage and return to the front with a *shuffle hop step ball change* circling the arms inwardly as they do so. Once facing the front the dancer's *battement* their right leg and hold it in front of them then counter-act this by releasing the leg to the floor whilst lowering the body over the leg, both in canon (as shown in *figure 4.1*).

Figure 4.1: The chorus girl line-up in The Broadway Melody (1929)

As this is performed, a speciality dancer enters from stage left to stage right to commence a series of tap steps performed in pointe shoes, known as toe dancing. The camera alternates between close-ups on either the upper body or the legs, so one is never able to see a full-shot of the dancer. The footwork is limited due to the type of shoes and combines a series of hops, *shuffles,* and *separated wings* (as shown in *Figure 4.2*). During this section, the chorus remain stationary, framing the speciality dancer in a tight semi-circle. Upon conclusion of the toe dancing, the speciality dancer cartwheels over to stage left to exit. Simultaneously, the chorus girls shoulder their leg to the side and hop up stage to exit behind two pieces of scenery that concludes the number. Whilst the technical execution, such as that of the toe-dancer may seem

accomplished, throughout the number the rhythms of the tap dancing very seldom stray from the constant beat of the 4/4 time signature.

Figure 4.2: Toe-dancing in The Broadway Melody (1929)

The most active part of Lee's Hollywood career was during the 1920s and 1930s, his filming techniques are often now viewed as primitive when compared with later pioneers such as Berkeley, Astaire and Kelly, who transformed dance on film. These early musical films provide a glimpse of the style and manner of choreographic conventions of the time. These pre-golden age screen dances, exemplified by *Broadway Melody* and *Hollywood Revue of 1929,* also provide recorded evidence of the formulaic models of choreography for musical theatre productions that feature the standard precision line dances, use of acrobatic steps and tap dancing. By the mid-1940s onwards the performers' technical ability far superseded those of the early chorus dancers, and the focus of film musicals had matured and moved to utilise the talents of dancers who became movie stars. Lee's experience as a Vaudeville performer and successful choreographer on Broadway can be witnessed first-hand. Ries suggests that because Lee was involved in so many pictures, many of which were considered 'B' pictures with lower production values than those of an 'A' picture, his work in later films is often over-shadowed and

considered as being second-rate, due to the sheer lack of rehearsal time (Ries, 1988: 208). 'B' Pictures became popular during the 1940s and were lower budget pictures distributed as part of a double feature alongside the 'A' picture that had higher production costs. Whilst many later choreographers shaped the art of dance in musical film, Lee must be considered as one of the early pioneers in bringing musical theatre dance to the screen.

4.3 Bobby Connolly

Robert (Bobby) Connolly (b. 1895 – d. 1944) commenced his career as a choreographer on the Broadway stage in 1926 in such productions as *Kitty Kisses* and *The Desert Song*. Later productions included *Funny Face* (1927) with the dance team Fred and Adele Astaire, and two editions (1931 and 1934) of the *Ziegfeld Follies* (Miller, 1984: 345-348). Connolly made the transition to Hollywood in 1933 working initially at Warner Brothers studios until 1938 when he moved to MGM until his death in 1944 (Billman, 1997: 272-273). Connolly is credited with popularising tap dancing on the Broadway stage. Moulton stated that Connolly's 'emphasis was on rhythm, and he cast [dancers] almost solely on rhythmic aptitude' (1957: 33). Whilst it is unlikely that any of the stage work of Connolly was ever captured on camera, this suggestion is very evident in his film work at both Warner Brothers and MGM, featuring both Ruby Keeler and Powell, the leading movie stars of the 1930s who tap danced. Dance scholar Gregory Dennhardt states that the Connolly style can be best described as:

> …rhythm tap; it emphasized a perfect union between the dancer's toe work and the musical beats. The tapper attempted to match or supplement the orchestral percussion. Since it demanded precise timing, Connolly employed only dancers who had a natural ear for rhythm. He was the only dance director to emphasize skill over beauty.
>
> (Dennhardt, 1978: 47-48)

This is particularly indicative in MGM musical numbers, especially in the development of dance technique of the featured performers and large ensembles. Some of the earliest musicals featuring dance such as *The Broadway Melody* and *The Hollywood Revue of 1929* reflect the low

standards in dance training of the chorus girls who appear to struggle with some of the simplest steps. For the majority of his dances, the choreography is relegated to the ensemble dancers and the overall concept of the production number, whilst the star dancers would often contribute to developing their own material for their performances. Dona Massin, a dancer who assisted Connolly on several MGM pictures stated that:

> I worked mostly with Bobby Connolly… he was wonderful, didn't know his left foot from the right, but he was a wonderful man. He knew what he wanted and he was a great choreographer, but not a dancer so to speak. He liked to work people really hard… actually most of your dance directors didn't dance very much, they knew what they wanted but they couldn't do it themselves. They knew dancing when they saw it… whatever I did he used to take and use it.
>
> (TCM, 2001)[VHS]

Dancers Astaire and Powell have been credited with choreographing their individual steps in the style of dance and movement that was most associated with them. In a 1971 interview, Powell discusses working on *Broadway Melody of 1940* with Astaire, and how they approached choreographing the two duets: 'Italian Café Routine' and 'Begin the Beguine', stating that 'we had no choreographer at all. What made it so difficult was that nobody could do what I was doing but me' (Powell, 1971, cited in Kobal, 1986: 102). Powell makes it quite clear that she never had a choreographer work with her, only with the background dancers, which suggests that Connolly was relegated to the positioning and framing of Powell with the ensemble, however, no production records exist to clarify this working relationship.

Connolly's career at Warner Brothers, prior to moving to MGM, saw him work in direct competition to Berkeley. Delamater acknowledges that the choreography and contribution of Berkeley in filming dance often-overshadowed Connolly's work, yet Berkeley's principal 'dancer' became the camera rather than the individual performer. Similar to Berkeley, Connolly also demonstrated a fascination with military motifs that can be seen in several films during his time at Warner Brothers and MGM. (Delamater, 1981: 92). Having endured the depression during the 1930s, America was soon to enter the Second World War, both topics provided

narrative and thematic sources for Hollywood musical films as reflected in the choreography of Connolly and Berkeley. Scholar Willliam H. McNeill in his survey of the psychological effects of military drills and dance in history suggests:

> As the dancer loses himself in the dance, as he becomes absorbed in the unified community, he reaches a state of elation in which he feels himself filled with energy or force immediately beyond his ordinary state, and so finds himself able to perform prodigies of exertion.
>
> (McNeill, 1995: 8)

This correlation between drills and dance also acts as a signifier for the reception of the audience as most dance in these film musicals climax with a goal; whether that be the male protagonist finally winning the affection of a woman; the unknown dancer suddenly becoming an overnight star; or the spectacle of a finale that closes the film; the excitement of dance lifts the spirits of the audience and for that intimate moment in a darkened cinema, they become part of the unified community on screen.

Berkeley and Connolly collaborated on the MGM film *For Me and My Gal*, starring Garland and Kelly in his motion picture debut. Berkeley was at the helm as director of the picture, and Connolly was credited with staging the dance numbers. The title song is a plot point to show Garland and Kelly establishing a mutual romantic interest in each other. The number begins with Garland singing the verse and refrain with Kelly joining in two-part harmony for a repeat of the chorus. By the end of the song, the characters step onto the floor to commence the dance by reminding each other of well-known tap combinations from their experiences working in vaudeville. The rhythms are based around a steady accented 8th rhythm in 4/4 time that repeats, concluding each phrase with a break to signal the end of the rhythmic pattern. The two join by linking through the arms and travel forward in a series of *ball changes* and *shuffle hops* that develop into a *scissor step* crossing each other in alternate directions. As the music builds the dancers join in a ballroom hold and travel around the floor space, finishing with a *tacet* in the music that enables the sounds of their basic *soft shoe break* to be heard audibly. The orchestration builds, signalling their newfound mutual affection for each other whilst Garland

and Kelly commence a series of steps known as *essences*, which are reflective of the traditional *soft sh*oe dances. Throughout this section they alternate between dancing apart and in linking arms. The number concludes with the two of them coming together with Kelly behind Garland in a tight hold to sing the last four bars of the song to end sitting back at the table where they started. A constant rhythmic structure is maintained with the use of breaks to punctuate the end of a phrase.

Figure 4.3: Gene Kelly and Judy Garland in hold in For Me and My Gal (1942)

'For Me and My Gal' is representative of the numbers that do not feature a large ensemble, but instead focus on two performers, who by the end of the song and dance have taken a step forward in their relationship (as shown in *Figure 4*.3). Kelly's character was one with charisma and ambition, but questionable morals, and the duet gave the audience an opportunity to see a more approachable side. Intimate character numbers are few and far between in Connolly's film musicals. They give a rare opportunity to view choreography that goes beyond repetitive simplistic movement executed by a large number of dancers that echoes the previous decades

of precision line dancing. In fact, Connolly's most famous, and now iconic, choreographic contribution to the screen was the 'skipping step' performed by Dorothy, the Scarecrow, Tin Man and Cowardly Lion down the yellow brick road in *The Wizard of Oza*. However, Massin, when questioned about working on the picture and her contribution states that she was responsible for creating the step in rehearsals. Massin says:

> Well, I don't mean to take any pleasure, but when a dance director says Dona can you do something with a skip, you try something half decent and they like it, you just did it. It wasn't anything difficult, but it seems to be remembered from the picture.
>
> (2001)[22]

4.6 Dave Gould

Gould (b. 1899 – d. 1969) was a prolific film choreographer, and was the first dance director to win an Oscar for Dance Direction in 1935 for two separate dance numbers in the films *Broadway Melody of 1936* and *Folies Bergère* (1935). He was nominated for the remaining two years that the award was bestowed along with Lee, Connolly and Berkeley (oscars.org). Despite this recognition, Gould is absent in dance on film scholarship, although he was involved in several early Astaire and Rogers's pictures of the 1930s. Drawing upon Broadway stage experience, Gould was one of the few choreographers who moved amongst several of the major Hollywood studios during his career. Gould went to MGM in 1934 and choreographed several films featuring Powell although much of Gould's choreography is inevitably overshadowed by Powell, for she choreographed her own steps in the routines. Military inspired numbers became a stylistic theme identified with Powell, and as also demonstrated in the work of Connolly, Gould created routines in *Born to Dance* (1936) and *Rosalie* (1937) that would frame Powell. Whilst Gould worked on these early films at MGM, during the early 1940s he was relegated to the smaller studios, Universal, Republic and Monogram, until his retirement.

[22] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

There seems to be some discrepancy as to whether Gould was trained as a dancer or whether he was simply a director of dances. Billman states that Gould was trained as a dancer from the age of seven and worked in vaudeville (Billman, 1997: 340), whilst Pan stated that Gould, like Berkeley, was 'dependant on ideas and camera moves' (Pan cited in Davis, 1983)[23] rather than developing the movement vocabulary. Delamater observes that 'his choruses presented organized exhibitions which often used dance but just as often eschewed dance which might interfere with the spectacle for its own sake' (Delamater, 1981: 93). An example of this can be viewed in *Born to Dance* with Powell in the grand finale 'Swingin' the Jinx Away'. This twelve-minute number is at the climax of the film and establishes Powell's character as a Broadway star. The number is set on a proscenium arch stage, although the advantage of being on a film studio sound stage is particularly obvious, as it is unlikely that the size of the set and the number of ensemble involved would fit into the stage of a regular Broadway theatre.

Whilst the number does focus on Powell and her dancing, the beginning two sections feature singer Frances Langford and eccentric dancer and comic actor, Buddy Ebsen. A male ensemble, dressed in white top hats and tails, frames Langford, and their movement consists of hand clapping and gestural actions, along with walking into different formations that always put the focus on Langford and her singing. An expansive draped curtain rises to reveal the top level of a battleship as a male and female ensembles perform a series of *cartwheels, somersaults* and *forward walk-overs*. The camera gradually moves forward to focus on two male acrobats who perform a series of hand balances. These steps became the staple of ensemble numbers demonstrating the acrobatic skill of chorus dancers. Ebsen appears inside a rising and rotating turret with chorus women standing on the outside platform. Upon seeing the audience, Ebsen

[23] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library

moves towards the camera to sing and perform his speciality dance[24] with tap dance and, what appears to be un-coordinated arm and leg actions. The next section cuts to Langford at the helm of the ship's wheel, framed by four male dancers dressed as naval officers using telescopes to look out towards the audience. The camera next pans up a narrow spiral staircase to reveal Powell who begins her descent down the stairs before sliding down a pole to meet the four officers and then continues down another staircase to a larger dance floor. Powell begins her dance routine circling the space with a series of *tap step heels*, *toe beats*, *kicks*, elevated *ball change* turns and *cabrioles*. These steps became a common repetitive feature in her work, with her sequences often displaying the same rhythmic patterns arranged in a different order. Powell's skill was demonstrated by the sheer speed of the footwork and clear clarity of beating produced by her tap shoes, and this combination of tap, ballet and acrobatic work provided her with a signature style throughout her movie career. Each Powell film culminated in a large spectacular finale, which in the case of most of the films that were backstage musicals, celebrated Powell's character as making it as a successful overnight star.

Figure 4.4: Eleanor Powell in one of her trademark développé movements with back bend in Born to Dance (1936)

[24] Ebsen was considered a comic dancer who, according to Kislan (1987: 28) portrayed the country hick. A comic dancer exhibited a clear character, idea and story within the act which differed from the eccentric dancers of the time period who, as Kislan defines 'were funny for what he was whilst the comic was funny for what he did'. Ebsen was by no means one of Hollywood's greatest male dancers, but he provided a clear distinction between the more refined Astaire model that was popular at the same time.

Powell continues down another flight of stairs performing an *a cappella* section. As Powell moves stage right the camera reveals a semi-circular line of men who form a military band. Consisting of tubas, trumpets, trombones, saxophones and clarinets, each instrument, in turn, builds the vamp in the music that causes Powell to respond by travelling from stage right to left. The men form two lines as the tempo increases leading to another short *a cappella* section from Powell that highlights her clustered rhythms using *heel beats*. The music builds into a swing section with the musicians forming a tight semi-circle around Powell who interacts with the men in shot. Powell moves into her *développé* and *back bend* section, the movement of low to high with the instruments as demonstrated in *figure 4.4* mirrors the height of each leg movement.

Powell then descends another flight of stairs to reveal the helm of the ship featuring protruding Naval guns. She semi-circles the construction using a series of *chaîné* turns. The camera cuts to reveal Powell and a series of drummers moving to the front of stage so that the entire battleship is revealed. Drums and piccolos in the instrumentation are mimicked by the light tone in Powell's beats. The sailors move forward to join Powell in a traditional *shim-sham*. The camera moves back to show all of the ensemble coming onto stage to join a large military band that slowly marches forward as Powell executes a series of *battements en cloche* and *relevés à la seconde*. Powell then commences a series of *fouetté* turns, the ensemble move to a tight formation around Powell as she performs a series of *forward walkovers* over trombones that have been pointed on the diagonal towards the floor by the sailors kneeling. The number

concludes with Powell, saluting and the entire ensemble, facing forward holding their instruments by the sides of the body to suggest the conclusion of the military drill (*see figure 4.5*).

Figure 4.5: The finale 'Swingin' the Jinx Away' in Born to Dance (1936)

Powell's choreography contains a series of movements evident throughout her entire body of work in film musicals that does not deviate in its vocabulary, irrespective of the choreographer assigned to the picture. Gould's responsibility here is clearly shown in the management of such a large ensemble in the space that continually emphasise Powell's position and do not detract attention away from her as the primary focus. As a result the vocabulary is simplistic in its execution, emphasising the spectacle of the production number, over its content. Other than featured dancers this formulaic approach to large ensemble numbers became a motif throughout the MGM musicals of the 1940s.

Connolly and Gould were influential contributors to the use of dance in the MGM musical, however with a lack of training and breadth of knowledge in the dance vocabularies, their

contribution is easily lost. With Powell a significant force as the central performer, and whose own choreographic work is discussed in Chapter 7, what remains of their work is relegated to background framing ensuring that focus is not lost from the star of the film. Long shots establish the expanse of the sound stages and illustrate the sheer number of dancers and extras gathered for each number, but throughout much of the performances the dancers remain static or execute limited movements. Alton, the last choreographer to be discussed in this chapter represents the old and new schools of approaches to dance on film. Like his predecessors he was an established dance director in theatre and was contracted to MGM throughout the 1940s. What worked to Alton's advantage was not only his ability as a practitioner, but also the time he came to Hollywood corresponded with the rise in significance of dance on screen and its more cohesive integration into musicals.

4.7 Robert Alton

Delamater identifies many of the most successful dance directors in Hollywood, namely Loring, Cole, Kidd and Fosse, who became prolific because their choreographic work is characteristic of their dance genre specialities, whereas the work of Pan and Alton rarely show such idiosyncrasies. Of the choreographers at MGM, the career of Alton (b. 1897 – d. 1957) spanned the widest, commencing in 1936 and ending with his death in 1957. Dancer Marge Champion remembers that 'Bob was a master of what we call busy choreography. He could put more steps in 4 or 8 bars than anybody you ever met. That's wearing but it also pays off' (Champion, 2004)[25]. However, similar to Connolly and Gould, he often worked on projects with major film stars who danced and often devised their own choreography for speciality numbers based on their talents. What is left of his choreography on film often results in 'staging' as opposed to utilising a significant and creative variety in the movement vocabulary. Dancer Dante Di Paolo, who worked in a number of Alton films at MGM, described Alton as:

[25] *The Masters Behind the Musicals* (2004), DVD Documentary

> Well, I guess he was like a Ziegfeld, like a Flo Ziegfeld type. He had the kind of mind that encompassed the whole thing, like sets and everything.
>
> (Di Paolo cited in Davis, 1979: 20)[26]

Di Paolo's observation of Alton as a choreographer was:

> It seemed to me like he would stage, he was more of a stager than a choreographer. He seemed to work more with the chorus and everything.
>
> (Di Paolo cited in Davis, 1979:27)[27]

Kelly suggested that Alton changed the typical chorus routine from the precision line, to breaking up the group of dancers to provide more variety in the use of the space (Miller, 1984: 248). Moulton discusses Alton's style as being heavily influenced by the modern and balletic dancers of the 1930s and 1940s. Originally schooled as a tap dancer, like many of the early dance directors, Alton incorporated and manipulated these dance genres to serve the overall aesthetic look of the dance he was working on, therefore melding different genres together to form one coherent sense of style (Moulton, 1957: 63-69).

This manipulation of dance genres is evident in Alton's work on the 1947 collegiate musical film *Good News,* based on the 1927 Broadway musical. Set at the conclusion of the film following the resolution of the romantic entanglements, 'The Varsity Drag' is located in the school gym featuring the students celebrating at their school dance. The central couple are June Allyson and Peter Lawford who begin by singing. The lyrics describe a new form of dance that Allyson demonstrates to Lawford. The movement consists of lifting the knees and slapping the thighs with both hands and responding to the lyrics 'down on your heels and up on your toes' (DeSylva and Brown, 1927). Following the conclusion of the song Lawford punctuates the lyrics through movement and the ensemble respond by copying the motif. The choreography features a considerable use of the arms involving circling them over the head and extending to a lifted

[26] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library
[27] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library

third arabesque or high 'V' line. The opening section begins with the dancers lined up on raised platforms in close proximity to each other. Allyson and Lawford lead the dance break with the ensemble following to fill the space in the large school hall. A repetitive step that includes quick running steps with an extension of the legs and arms in opposition, the male and female dancers separate into two single gender sections. The female dancers mimic Charleston kicks and clap and extend the arms up above their heads, following on with lifting the knees and slapping their thighs. The section finishes with a clap and two sharp arm extensions that mirror the accents in the music as emphasized by the brass section. The male dancers respond with identical movements.

The dancers then move together to form a large 'V' shape formation, with all of the female dancers on stage right and all of the male dancers on stage left. Simultaneously the bandleader, in possession of a trumpet, leaps off the bandstand and moves to the front of the formation to join Allyson and Lawford. The bandleader is lifted into the air and plays his trumpet whilst Allyson and Lawford commence a jive section that emulates the high kicks of the Charleston with basic Jive steps in-between, social dances that were gaining in popularity at the time the musical film is set. The dancers frame the couple executing hand claps at different levels from low to high, eventually crossing to the opposite sides. New couple formations emerge as the camera pans back to reveal the entire gymnasium filled with the dancers. They repeat the 'Drag' motif facing each other and the same Jive and Charleston steps holding the extension of the leg at 90 degrees in a freeze as the music punctuates the hold that can be seen in *Figure 4.6*.

Figure 4.6: A large formation with 'V' arm movements in Good News (1947)

In a circular formation, the male dancers move on the outside and the female dancers cluster together in the middle. The camera reveals the females dancing with each male (similar to a square dance) in turn as they move round the circle repeating the Jive and Charleston motif with an added turn so that they move around the male dancers more speedily. They then jump and clap moving to a tight formation on different levels of the bandstand with lines of male and female dancers. The camera moves in to reveal Allyson and Lawford at the top of the Pyramid, who sing as if addressing the audience before finishing with a kiss as the picture fades to the end title.

Despite the film being set in 1927, the movement seems to reflect the influence of swing and big band music, whilst paying homage to the popularity of the Charleston and Black Bottom dances of the 1920s. Whilst the footwork is very repetitive in terms of the 'Drag' step and Jive and Charleston motifs, the use of arms is ever present in the choreography with a strong emphasis on extended lines above the head. This is a movement style seen in several numbers throughout the film and is reflective of Alton's work in other film musicals. The 1946 film *Till The Clouds Roll By*, a biopic of composer Jerome Kern, features examples of musical numbers from

several Kern productions. Pictured in *figure 4.7* is the title number from his 1917 musical *Leave it to Jane*, featuring Allyson once again at the centre of the number. The same movement, as shown in *figure 4.6,* is presented albeit in a different formation, however the remainder of the number features a continuous use of arm movements.

Figure 4.7: Another formation using the 'V' arm movements in Till the Clouds Roll By (1946)

Alton became known for the speed and tenacity of his dancers, and received many compliments from those that he worked with. Dancer and film star Donald O'Connor stated that Alton was 'like a painter, you knew which brush stroke was his. He might be the greatest choreographer that ever lived.' (2004)[28]. Dancer George Chakiris, who started as an MGM chorus dancer before playing the role of Bernardo in the film version of *West Side Story* (1961) stated that Alton 'would just present the star that he was choreographing for in the best possible way'

[28] *The Masters Behind the Musicals* (2004), DVD Documentary

(Chakiris cited in Davis, 1982: 11)[29]. Chakiris compared Alton with Robbins, stating that Robbins' main concern was that dancing 'was a continuation of the plot. In other words, things still kept moving' (Chakiris cited in Davis, 1982:12)[30]. In contrast, Alton's approach often meant the story would stop for an entertaining musical number.

In his autobiography Astaire provides little insight into the working practices in his pictures, with an apparent reluctance to delve into the creation of his choreography. However, Astaire does acknowledge Alton as the choreographer on several pictures. In a 1979 interview Astaire described Alton as 'so clever, that fellow, I think he was terrific.' (Astaire cited in Davis, 1976: 39).[31] Second only to Pan, Alton worked on more pictures with Astaire than any other choreographer at MGM. Mueller stated that Alton was heavily involved in the creation and initial plan of the musical numbers in the Astaire films, particularly in the film *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946), working alongside director Minnelli on several elaborate segments. Tap dancer Ann Miller refutes Alton's dance ability as a choreographer, claiming that tap dancer Nick Castle worked on the tap portions of 'Shaking the Blues Away', whilst Alton 'worked with me on the song and the arms and the movements' (Miller cited in Frank, 1994: 247). However Miller was a speciality tap dancer, as discussed in Chapter 7, and there is nothing in Alton's body of work to suggest tap was a specialist genre to him. As Alton worked on films with a number of the leading dancers at MGM, it does not seem out of place that there would be a degree of collaboration between the choreographer and the dancer. Kelly and Alton first worked together at MGM on the 1948 Minnelli film *The Pirate*. Having previously worked together on the Broadway production *Pal Joey* (1940), Kelly credits Alton with allowing him to develop his own style of dance as the lead character Joey. Kelly stated that 'we shared credit on *The Pirate,* but I would have given Bob Alton credit just out of gratefulness' (Kelly 1973, cited in Delamater,

[29] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library
[30] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library
[31] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library

1981: 208). Because of the collaboration, Kelly received co-credit for choreography for *The Pirate*. Film historians Earl J. Hess and Pratibha A. Dabholkar conclude that Kelly created his own choreography for the musical numbers he worked upon, whilst Alton devised the staging for the chorus dancers (Hess and Dabholkar, 2014: 67) which highlights the importance and trust that was given to film stars who also danced.

During his time as choreographer, Alton was very vocal about his choreographic methods on the stage and screen, and did not prepare ahead of time. In a 1952 interview Alton stated:

> I study the script, listen to the music, and then go away and dream about it for a while. When I have the ideas I need, I get together with the designers, begin rehearsals, and work out from there the final arrangements of both dances and music.
>
> (Alton cited in Kislan, 1987: 63)

This could explain why there is a repetitive nature in the choreography as the emphasis here is on the overall production of a number rather than furthering the movement vocabulary in the dance genres utilised. The later work of Kelly, Cole, Loring, Kidd and Fosse to name a few, explored the movement content and how this could be integrated into musical film, and stage choreography.

Marge Champion, who appeared alongside her husband and future and Broadway choreographer Gower Champion, credits Alton with teaching her about the process of choreography, the differences between stage and film and how the camera captures movement. Champion states that 'film seems to slow down movement. Unless of course it's accelerated' (2003).[32] This would explain the element of speed in Alton's choreographic arrangements and why there is such an exaggerated use of the arms. Champion continues explaining that 'you have to put a lot of steps into it and do things very fast and then you have a chance to stop so

[32] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Centre

that the camera can come in'(2003)[33]. When questioned about the reasons for this she explains that what the audience sees does not allow for the three-dimensional angles that a theatre audience would see stating that:

> …it's because it's flat. You don't have the same thing that you have on the stage with the depth behind you. I said to Bob Alton, "why do we have to do this so fast?" [discussing the opening number in *Show Boat* (1951)], and he said "because first of all it will look right for the period and on screen it just looks like we are dancing fast."
>
> (2003)[34]

Whilst Alton's movement style and vocabulary echoed the earlier dance directors of the 1930s, his understanding of the camera and how to utilise the space and dancers seems to reflect the growth in technical understanding of what is more effective on film.

The first part of this chapter has highlighted the significant lack of recognition that the film choreographers faced during the most productive era of musicals on screen. The lack of union membership and the withdrawal of Academy Award acknowledgement helped shift the focus away from the importance of dance in film. Astaire and Powell, as dance stars, maintained a strong presence in films, but this overshadowed the work of these early choreographers. Lee, Connolly and Gould represent a period of film history when studios were experimenting with the medium and there was a limited focus on the technical capacity of the dancers and the movement created. The authorship of choreographic work during the 1930s seems better placed on the film stars that were primarily dancers and created their own individual styles and steps that are recurring motifs throughout their body of work. As with the sub-genres of film discussed in Chapter 3, dance in these early films was more for spectacle and was not fully cohesive to the plot. In echoing developments on Broadway, the very integration of music, text

[33] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Centre
[34] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Centre

and dance appeared to elevate the status of dance and therefore allow for a more distinguishable choreographic style to emerge.

It seems ironic that of all the early dance directors, it would be the non-dancer Berkeley who *did* assert authorial control over the work he created. His dance was for spectacle, but whilst Berkeley's knowledge of dance vocabulary is limited, he explored the use of the medium and manipulated the film camera to become the performer. The dance content is basic, and a close eye will reveal that the tap sounds and footwork do not always synchronise, however Berkeley established such a strong visual style that he established a distinguishable voice that overtook the work of the director.

The career of Berkeley and Alton shifted in oppositional pathways, Berkeley may have been the saviour of the musical film in the 1930s, but by the 1940s his career waned and his lack of formal dance training limited his ability to maintain his status amongst the new breed of choreographers in Hollywood. Alton, whilst part of the same generation of choreographers, was adept enough as a practitioner to maintain an ongoing presence in musical films. His work, whilst having recognisable traits, did not have a strong enough presence of individual style to make his numbers stand out alone. The following chapter will further develop the ideas suggested here, in exploring the choreographers who helped to shape dance on film during the 1940s and 1950s.

Chapter 5: 'Shine on Your Shoes': Later Choreographers at MGM

The choreographers discussed in this chapter provide examples of the significant shift in, and integration of, different dance genres into the musical film vocabulary. Pan's career, more than any other film choreographer, spanned the early dance films of Astaire and Rogers through to the decline of the studio system and beyond. As a technical dancer he was not in the same league as his later contemporaries, but Pan did engage dance in a way that represented the developments of dance on screen discussed in this chapter. Loring and Kidd both had established themselves in the development of American ballet and their respective movement styles signalled an ability to choreograph technically challenging movement on dancers with a strong classical base. Kidd's and Loring's work represents a parallel in the film musical with that of the Broadway musical. The integration of dance into not only the narrative of the film, but in its ability to further develop character and emotional plot points, became significant. Kidd's choreography utilised the growing vocabulary of theatrical jazz dance, Loring's choreography was still embedded within the classical ballet genre. Cole, whose experience in Hollywood was mainly based at Columbia Studios, introduced dancers, and audiences to an earthy and more grounded jazz dance style. Cole's mix of modern and 'ethnic' styles, such as Indian dance, consistently challenged the boundaries of the film censors who enforced the Hollywood Production Code and stipulated what was appropriate for appearing on film[35]. He also became synonymous with choreographing for actresses Betty Grable in *Three for the Show* (1955) and Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). Whilst not a regular contributor to the

35 Part of the continual problem that Hollywood films faced was the 1934 restrictions enforced on them by the trade association, Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), and its sub-office the Production Code Administration (PCA). In his study of the PCA, American culture scholar Gregory D. Black (1989), surveyed the control this office had over the production of Hollywood films from 1934 until the 1950s (Black, 1989: 168). Black suggests that it was the Catholic Church's influence that established this moral code as they realised that 'films quickly evolved into a form of mass entertainment that attracted viewers from every segment of American society' (Black, 1989: 169). More commonly known as the Hollywood Production Code, the documents outlined a series of restrictions and censorship of what was deemed morally acceptable on the screen.

MGM musical, the legacy of Cole is significant to include here because of his influence on the vocabulary of movement and advancement of jazz dance technique.

The development of theatrical jazz dance stems from the Charleston and Lindy Hop, which were a response to the jazz music of the 1920s to 1940s. The term was first applied to Coles's theatrical presentations during the 1940s and 1950s and represents 'a fusion of styles, usually borrowing from ballet and vernacular jazz at the foundation' (Guarino and Oliver, 2014: 26). Whilst the vernacular, or social stems of jazz dance would continue to grow and expand as a reaction to differing musical styles, theatrical jazz would eventually become a mainstay in the Broadway dance tradition. During the 1950s and 1960s theatrical jazz dance saw an integration of balletic, modern, tap and ethnic dance styles. Its largest development happened on the Broadway stage during the 1960s and 1970s with Musical Theatre Jazz becoming an identifiable style in its own right. Dance scholars Lindsay Guarino and Wendy Oliver (2014: 27) suggest that this term demonstrated a merger of any style of dance that is suitable to the musical production. In musical film Loring, Cole and Kidd demonstrate the adaptability of this style to suit the narrative and movement style of each film production.

5.1 Hermes Pan

Hermes Pan's (b. 1905 – d. 1990) career saw him work at most of the major musical film producing studios: RKO during the 1930s, 20th Century Fox during the 1940s and MGM from 1949 until 1957. His career as a choreographer continued into the mid-1970s despite the decline in the production of film musicals. Pan was nominated each year for Best Dance Direction at the Academy Awards, eventually winning the final award given in 1937 for the film *A Damsel in Distress* (oscars.org). He was one of the few choreographers to appear alongside his co-stars as a dancing partner, namely in films starring Grable, during his time at 20th Century Fox.

Pan's film career began in 1933 where he was employed as an assistant to Gould at RKO studios working on the Astaire film *Flying Down to Rio*. Pan recalls:

> The dance director actually wasn't very much of a dancer. He was more of a promoter [of ideas], so I worked directly with Fred [Astaire]. He liked my work so much that he requested me for his next picture. After that, the studio gave me a contract and I did all the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers pictures.
>
> (Pan cited in Georgakas, 1983:26)

Pan was one of the few dance directors who did dance, but he did not undertake formal training, stating that he was self-taught and picked up steps from dancers whilst a teenager. He credits his experience with rhythms and music to the influences of his childhood growing up in Nashville, Tennessee (Fantle and Johnson, 2004: 87). Pan stated 'when I hear music, and especially when I like it, I see motion… I just do what the music tells me to do' (Franceschina, 2012: 22).

Pan's career will be forever identified with his close creative relationship with Astaire, beginning at RKO studios and resuming upon Astaire's return from retirement in 1949 to work at MGM, collaborating on over twelve pictures together. During his time at RKO, following his apprenticeship with Dave Gould on two pictures, Pan was contracted as choreographer for the remaining Astaire and Rogers vehicles until their film partnership ended in 1939. These early films saw the integration of dance into the narrative of the plot, several years before the work of de Mille was celebrated. In each Astaire and Rogers film, dance was the major catalyst in instigating, or further developing, the central romantic plot between the two dancers. The most common device saw Astaire in pursuit of Rogers' character and by the climax of the musical number; dance became a form of seduction and saw the blossoming romance consummated. In her discussion on the dances of Astaire and Rogers, Croce commented on one of the teams early films, *The Gay Divorcee* (1934), that during the 'The Continental' number 'Gould's staging of the dances has a theme-and-variations plot but no continuity within the dance structure' (Croce, 1972: 36), suggesting that the larger ensemble dances that the pair appeared in did little to advance, or relate, to the overall narrative of the film. In their third film *Roberta* (1934), Astaire

receives credit for the dances, whilst Pan is credited as staging the ensemble numbers. In a 1983 interview in *Cineaste* magazine, Pan was asked about his approach to the integration of the plot and dance. Pan stated:

> Usually the script would just say, "And they go into a dance." Our problem was how and what. Costumes and those details were determined to some degree in the plot, but we had a lot of freedom. In *Top Hat* there was a number set in Central Park. She was riding and he was following her on a horse. Irving Berlin had written "Isn't This a Lovely Day to be Caught in the Rain" with the intention of having the number in Central Park. But the script didn't tell us how to get into it. They were having a spat, so we had to figure how they could start to sing and dance together without jarring the audience's sense of reality. That was the real challenge of those numbers: to make things believable, not to jar, not to have people laugh … I think that was one of our successes, to move from the drama to the surreal of music and back again.
>
> (Pan cited in Georgakas, 1983: 27-28)

The working relationship with Astaire was one of mutual respect and admiration. Astaire had the final say on his numbers, whilst acknowledging that Pan was the most trusted and influential collaborator alongside him (Mueller, 1985: 14). Pan stated that:

> He [Astaire] was doing most of his own stuff, but he kept relying more and more on me. And so it got to be like a collaboration more or less. I used to do – well, I would say – fifty/sixty percent of the choreography.
>
> Like his rhythm and my rhythms were, just exactly almost, it's almost uncanny that we would do things so much alike. And we even sort of had a little language ourself [*sic*].
>
> (Pan cited in Davis, 1983)[36]

Pan preferred working with only a small number of dancers, rather than staging large ensembles, which would account for his career working alongside some of the biggest dancing film stars. The reason for Pan's preference was:

> I like to tell a story. It makes it much more interesting. You don't see much storytelling in dance today. It's just steps. You rarely see something that has a little fantasy, no matter how simple.
>
> (Pan in Georgakas, 1983: 28).

[36] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library

Pan made no apologies for the fact that he did not prepare his choreography in advance, preferring to develop the ideas with the bodies in front of him upon hearing the music. He described:

> You start doing steps, like an exercise. Then something finally develops and you say to yourself, this gives me an idea … and then something just sort of comes by itself
>
> (Pan cited in McLee Grody and Daniels Lister, 1996: 3).

Pan's working methods could also be attributed to the limitations in the language of movement he was closely associated with. Dancer Barrie Chase, who worked in several MGM films before dancing with Astaire in his television specials, stated that Pan was 'not a choreographer for the Ballet trained person. It wasn't his vocabulary' (Chase, 2014). He was knowledgeable in tap dancing, but Chase stressed it was not such an easy working relationship outside of that:

> When I started working with Pan, and we didn't have a mutual language, in certain sections I took the lead and created it. He would say "Oh yeah, do that" … what we used to do was sketch it out so that had something to hang onto; sometimes we [with his assistant Pat Denise] would set it when Pan wasn't around. So there was a lot of that with Pan.
>
> (Chase, 2014)

Pan was highly regarded by the dancers he worked with because of the freedom that he gave them when working on specific musical numbers. Dancer Tommy Rall, who appeared in *Kiss Me, Kate* (1953), stated:

> I love the choreographer who would let you work on your own. Then he'd say why don't you try it this way or that way. Hermes Pan was very co-operative in that way.
>
> (2004)[37]

Rall continued to explain the process as thus:

> … if it was a number where we did a lot of special things then he would say "what do you feel comfortable doing?" He would let you work out

[37] *The Masters Behind the Musicals* (2004), DVD Documentary

> that kind of thing. A lot of choreographers get very rigid. Hermes Pan was very cooperative on that kind of thing.
>
> (1996)[38]

Similarly, in *Hit the Deck* (1955), dancer Russ Tamblyn felt that 'he [Pan] liked creativity and gave me a lot of room to do things' (2004).[39] Pan altered his working relationship dependant on the dancers he was working with. Rall and Tamblyn were both highly skilled with very specific dance styles: Rall was an all-round dancer with formal training in ballet and tap styles, with a style that incorporated acrobatics and high elevated leaps. Tamblyn demonstrated a less formal training, but a greater ability in acrobatic and gymnastic movement.

'Fated to Be Mated', music and lyrics by Porter, is the final duet between Astaire and Charisse in *Silk Stockings*. The number is set on a French film studio soundstage, providing three alternate backdrops for the progression of the number. The characters of the American Steve Canfield (Astaire) and the Russian Ninotchka (Charisse) have succumbed to their mutual affection for each other and Canfield has proposed in order that Ninotchka may remain in Paris with him. The proposal is discarded as 'impossible' due to the Ministry of Moscow's disapproval of Western values, Canfield responds by singing. The song begins with the two characters sitting on a garden wall with a painted backdrop of a large garden behind them. Astaire is dressed in a light wool jacket, dark tweed trousers, a blue shirt and taupe coloured tie. A red handkerchief is placed in the breast pocket and white oxford shoes provide a contrast in colours. Charisse wears a pink pastel shade blouse and light grey ¾ length skirt (it is interesting to note that during the number the skirt is replaced with culottes when the movement requires Charisse to kneel on the floor), and as with many of her dances with Astaire she wears a pair of flat slip-on shoes. As the song develops, Astaire has lightened the down-hearted mood of Charisse, taking her into his arms and manoeuvring her around the soundstage. Lampposts and a park

[38] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Centre
[39] *The Masters Behind the Musicals* (2004), DVD Documentary

bench provide a purpose for some playful interchange between the two characters suggesting the romantic yearnings they have for each other. The orchestration during this section is filled with string instruments and the melody is clearly identified by the commanding presence of the brass section.

As they reach a corridor (presumably leading to another street), Astaire lifts Charisse onto his hip as she circles both legs in an outward, fan like, round kick. They repeat the movement disappearing behind the wall and the camera catches them as they appear through a large doorway. Upon repeating the movement Charisse lowers each leg alternately stepping out of the lift to take a large step and *pas de bourrée* with Astaire following. The musical accompaniment has changed significantly to have a stronger accent on the beats of the bar, with a silent 4th and 8th count which is mimicked in the movement, the brass instruments are fuller in sound along with chimes from the percussion, the music mimics the Tango. The set has changed to suggest a large courtyard, with balconies in the background and circular platform in the centre. The camera has tracked their movements across the soundstage until they are both in the centre of the screen in a full-bodied shot. The dancers execute a turn and *ronde de jambe* one leg forwards landing the circled foot loudly on the floor before travelling backwards and jumping the feet together. They continue this reciprocal exchange with each other through knowing glances during the dance movement. A series of steps on the counts of 3, *5* and *7* take the dancers up onto a raised platform, ending in a pose with a flexed foot and strong hold through the arms and body in 3rd position of a *port de bras*. A small turn and jump ends in a crossed fourth position of the feet, in a *plié,* with the arms wrapped around the body. They turn to the opposite side and mirror the position although are more upright in their stance, before springing into a kneel on the left knee (you can notice here how Charisse's skirt changes to

culottes) before executing a *knee spin*, a step not commonly associated with the Astaire vocabulary (see *figure 5.1)*.

Figure 5.1: Charisse and Astaire mid knee spin

The two dancers interweave around each other, Charisse's arms held above the head in an inverted classical fifth position suggest a toreador's game of chase with the bull. The two break apart and jump into an attitude leap which mirrors the highlights in the blare of the brass instrumentation. With a *developpé* of the leg the dancers travel across the centre of the raised platform and step down onto a previously unseen area of the soundstage with a variety of low walls featuring plant pots and large Roman-esque columns. The additional dance space provides the opportunity for the dancers to utilise greater levels by pushing off the columns and lifting Charisse onto the walls whilst still circling each other in their cat and mouse game. As Astaire and Charisse move down stage towards the camera they hold each other's waists and *box step* with each other side by side. The camera has tracked further away and reveals a gated opening in front of the columns, Astaire lifts Charisse and repeats the motif of executing a circle of both legs whilst the camera follows the movement as they disappear through to a different soundstage.

The final section of the dance reveals a soundstage that is designed to suggest a boatyard. The backdrop is a plain taupe colour, the floorboards reveal a light grey decking effect. The only separation between the blandness of the backdrop and floor is a soundstage filled with barrels, a variety of different sized crates and netting suspended from beams, which in a dark colouring of wood provide a strong contrast from the bleak surroundings. Musically and choreographically there are distinct changes in this section. The music contrasts with the rhythmic intensity of the tango significantly by changing style to an easy 4/4 swing rhythm, the melody reprises the song 'All of You' from an earlier duet in the film. An earlier adagio duet had established the initial romantic relationship between the two characters, this number presents them as two equals who have *joie de vivre* in their response to the up-beat bounce in the music and resolves the narrative from earlier in the film. The dancers appear completely at ease with each other and convey genuine element of fun in their interchanges throughout this lighter section (on a poignant note this would be the last on-screen dance the pair performed together). The barrels are placed to provide levels in which Charisse can be placed upon and lifted off, whilst a variety of crates are arranged in height order to give a series of steps for Astaire and Charisse to cavort up and down. Choreographically, Pan's keen ear for rhythm is most evident as musically the arrangement is rich in staccato accents from the drum and piano sections. The footwork consists of simple steps that suddenly increase in speed to become *step ball-changes*, interspersed with claps of clicks of the fingers which keep the bounce of the swing rhythm. Charisse executes a series of *developpés* and kicks with the legs which work in harmony with the punctuated beats of the music (see *figure 5.2*).

Figure 5.2: Charisse and Astaire in theor final duet

As in the previous section, Pan utilises the space effectively, particular in travelling from each side of the camera, only revealing a final section of the set not previously seen in the finale few phrase of the number. The difference in this last section is the creativity in the use of levels created by the props. Although it is clear the arrangement of the crates is contrived to suit the needs of the choreographed movement, their location in the space does not seem out of place, or give any indication as to what follows in the dance. Unlike Charisse's dances with Kelly where he most often initiates the lifts, in most instances here Astaire catches Charisse as she slowly drops from a higher level, with only the hip lifting motif between each section the major weight bearing moment in the choreography. Pan also exhibits a clear sense of structure in the staging of the number as the song and dance naturally develop out of each other. The shape of the number sees a natural rise in the dynamics towards the end of each section before returning to a calmer and consistent state, it is only at the very last moment in the third section that Pan intensifies the energy, matching that of the music, to conclude the performance. The camera moves across the soundstage to reveal a beam covered in netting and a raised platform containing another beam suspended in the air. In complete unison, Astaire and Charisse hold

onto the lower beam and slide through stopping by lifting their right leg onto the higher platform, a quick look behind and the dancers drop backwards and catch themselves on the beam. They repeat the slide through and step up onto the platform. The camera cuts to feature Astaire and Charisse in a full-frontal shot once again preparing to slide through the beam towards the end of the platform (see *figure 5*.3). As the camera pulls back, Astaire and Charisse perform another spin on the knees before Astaire steps down on the floor and catches Charisse as she falls ending in a close embrace as the camera fades out into the next scene.

Figure5. 3: Charisse and Astaire suspended on the rail

Pan's skill lay in the fundamental understanding of how to frame his dancers and showcase their specific skills, his collaborative relationship with Astaire is testament to the respect he commanded. However, Pan was also aware of how to showcase the star who may not have had the strongest dance technique:

> As long as the director and studio felt what you were doing didn't harm her [Betty Grable] characterization, you could do pretty much what you wanted to do. And those girls weren't any trouble to work with – not Rita [Hayworth], or Carmen [Miranda], who was a wonderfully funny gal to work with, and Betty was easy … You just had to bear in mind what she couldn't do.
>
> (Pan cited in Kobal, 1988: 191)

In terms of a movement style Pan's work would be hard to locate, particularly in relation to the choreographers discussed below, however Pan does exhibit stylistic traits through his work; the male/female duets that further enhance the relationship of the characters and integration of rhythmic, usually tap and jazz, dance idioms. Significantly Pan knew how to work with women and created stand-out routines for dancers Vera-Ellen and Ann Miller. In *Three Little Words*, Vera-Ellen dances with an ensemble of sailors to the song 'Come On, Papa', which is performed as a show-within-a-show setting. Biographer John Franceschina acknowledges the nonsensical nature of the number but offers that the number 'demonstrates how clearly Pan differentiates choreography designed for a vaudeville audiences and that created for a real-time dramatic situation' (2012: 174). Pan was also the only choreographer (beyond those that were primarily performers) that was well-versed in the tap dance idiom, so his work with Miller presents a series of numbers that are elevated beyond just a speciality act. In 'It's Dynamite' from *Texas Carnival* (1951) and 'I'll be Hard to Handle' from *Lovely to Look At* (1952), Miller is framed by an ensemble of male dancers rather than presented as a soloist. The creativity in the setting sees her dance across a xylophone and tap dance across a series of tables in the former and in both numbers the vocabulary extends beyond the Miller-*isms* analysed in Chapter 7. Pan was an important bridge between the old and new Hollywood musicals, in part because of long standing professional relationships with those performers who were products of the studio system.

5.2 Eugene Loring

Eugene Loring (b. 1911 – d. 1982) was one of the few choreographers at MGM who came with a ballet background between 1944 to 1957. Loring's significance as a choreographer in film marks a turning point in the approach to dance in the musical due to his background and formal training at the School of American Ballet under the tutelage of Balanchine. He became a soloist

with the American Ballet in 1936 and formed the company Ballet Caravan that focused on developing the work of American choreographers (Billman, 1997: 397). Loring choreographed for the ballet, in musical theatre productions in New York and signed a contract at MGM in 1943. He also founded the American School of Dance in Los Angeles, his own dance school before eventually becoming a Professor and Chair of the dance department at UC Irvine, California (University of California, 2011). Whilst his background was firmly grounded in the technique of classical ballet, Loring was influential in his approach to the integration of other idioms of dance within his choreographic style, including modern dance and jazz. Jazz dance was in its infancy during the 1940s and 1950s as a technical method of training, Loring integrated the genre into his work in the 1957 films *Meet Me in Las Vegas* and *Silk Stockings*. Dance scholar and historian Robert Boross (2006) stated that Loring referred to his technical classes as 'freestyle', as a way of linking many different dance styles into one (Boross, 2006: 220).

Much of Loring's work contained motifs that explored American themes, however his understanding of varied dance styles meant that he could choreograph musical numbers that suggested many different locations. Borross states that:

> Loring was creating unique movement on a project-by-project basis that melded traditional dance techniques with the dancer's ability to project a character. By combining ideas from acting techniques with theatrical dance movement, Loring was one of a handful of respected dance artists of the time, such as Jerome Robbins, Katherine Dunham, Jack Cole, and Bob Fosse, who were instrumental in establishing the presence of the technically savvy character dancer.
>
> (Boross, 2006: 221)

Loring's ballet influence was most notable in his first choreographic assignment at MGM, working with Astaire on the film *Yolanda and the Thief* in which he incorporated a dream ballet. With its Freudian overtones and elements of psychoanalysis of the protagonist character, portrayed by Astaire, it highlighted the popularity of the dream ballet in the integrated musical.

Delamater (1981) and Genné (2009) suggest that the brainchild of the ballet was the director Minnelli, whom Genné states was influenced by the 'surrealist artists who shared Freud's fascination with dreams and dream imagery', and was a device that had initially been utilised in Minnelli's work with Balanchine on the New York stage in 1936 (Genné, 2009: 240). Delamater quotes Loring as saying 'I didn't write any of the script, but I was in on the story conferences so that I could make the scene take the plot along instead of just having a number' (Loring cited in Delamater, 1981: 118). Much of Loring's best work is shown through the choreography he provided for balletic dancer and film star Charisse. With a foundation in classical ballet and time spent performing with the Ballets Russes, Charisse brought a strong technique to her dance performances, managing to adapt to the theatrical jazz dance style that became so popular.

'Coffee Time' from *Yolanda and the Thief* is an example of Loring's choreographic work that strayed from his roots in the classical ballet idiom; marking his first MGM musical as sole choreographer. The number, with music by Harry Warren, appears towards the end of the film and is the final duet between Astaire's character and his love interest, Yolanda, played by dancer Lucille Bremer. Having danced with Astaire in the previous year's *Ziegfeld Follies* and appeared alongside Garland in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), Bremer was elevated to the leading role in this film and was a statuesque partner for Astaire. Her career was short-lived with Astaire commenting:

> Lucille was an excellent dancer. Whatever there was about her that didn't please somebody, I don't know. You either have it or you haven't, as a personality and I don't know whether that was her problem or not… she was married shortly after, but I found her a lovely person to work with, and certainly a capable dancer.
>
> (Astaire cited in Davis, 1976: 35)[40]

[40] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library

In the TCM Archival interviews Bremer, who had long been away from the Hollywood scene, was interviewed in 1994. At fourteen minutes in length it was by far the shortest of all interviews conducted and revealed a former actress/dancer that had no real interest in the experiences that she had. On being questioned about 'Coffee Time', Bremer stated that she 'didn't think there was anything remarkable about it… it was really the floor that made it spectacular' (1994)[41].

Yolanda and the Thief would be Loring and Astaire's first picture together, Loring would later work on *Silk Stockings* (but not Astaire's numbers) and *Funny Face* (1957). Their relationship marked a first for Astaire, he allowed Loring the freedom to create the choreography without his involvement stating, 'I wanted to depend upon him to see what it would be like to do somebody else's choreography' (Astaire cited in Davis, 1976: 36)[42]. Loring confirmed that he was solely responsible for the choreography: 'he [Astaire] didn't want to do anything that he had done before. He didn't want to repeat himself'. Loring stated that Astaire gave him six hours of footage of earlier performances for him to watch to see what he had done previously (1976: 131-132)[43]. Loring's involvement in the film, particularly as a newer MGM employee, demonstrates a significant involvement in the pre-production process. In varying drafts of the scripts, found in the Vincente Minnelli Papers and the Turner/MGM Scripts collections, Loring was assigned to write outlines of the ballet that appears earlier in his film. His detailed synopsis provides an example in terms of the creative freedom director Minnelli entrusted to the choreographer. In describing the relationship between director and choreographer Loring stated that the difference between stage and film choreography was that he 'cannot choreograph without knowing where the camera is going to be' (Loring, 1976: 116)[44]. Whilst the director would have final say on the camera angles, Loring would invite the director into

[41] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center
[42] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library
[43] Eugene Loring Interview, Oral History Archive, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library
[44] Eugene Loring Interview, Oral History Archive, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library

rehearsals and make suggestions. The final word would be that of the director and Loring 'would alter to satisfy the director. However, there were many occasions where I actually did the camera work' (Loring, 1976: 117)[45].

Minnelli's musical films demonstrate an understanding of the value of dance to contribute to narrative and character development, particularly in the integration in to the overall musical. The director's artistic sensibilities, particularly in the rich technicolour landscapes and attention to detail in props and set, have become one of Minnelli's trademarks. It appears Minnelli entrusted people to do what they do best, and therefore gave the choreographers freedom to create the musical numbers, as discussed in Chapter 6. *Yolanda and the Thief* was not a financially successful film at the time of its release, with Minnelli noting it was 'ahead of its time' (1974: 157). The film and its musical numbers emphasise the fantasy aspect of the story and Minnelli stated his intention in the film was to demonstrate the 'interplay between the dream and reality. Every dream is an arrangement of some real aspects… only in the dream does all this become real, do we get to the truth of it' (1974:157). Mueller observes that utilising the device of a dream ballet might have offered some conclusion to the Astaire's character's dilemma however, it was inserted too early in the script (1985: 255) and so loses its momentum in terms of narrative thrust. 'Coffee Time' instead becomes a romantic duet which sees Astaire, on trying to escape his deception of Bremer, get caught up in the festivities and reveals the romantic feelings that Bremer has for the character.

In mirroring the avant-garde themes and structure of the film, Loring's approach to the number is also a first for musical film choreography. The music, a basic 4/4 time signature, is syncopated with a five count movement phrase. Musically, there are few accents in the orchestration and the use of the reed instruments provides a fluid continuity that sweeps through the melody line.

[45] Eugene Loring Interview, Oral History Archive, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library

Astaire, Bremer and the ensemble clap continually on the 1 and 3 in each 5-count phrase. Table 5.1 below gives an illustrative example of how the movement cross-phrases over the musical phrase, as a result the syncopation of the claps move the emphasis in each phrase, giving a disjointed, yet familiarity in the expectation of the clapping rhythm.

Musical Phrase	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3
Dancer's Phrase	**1**	2	**3**	4	5	**1**	2	**3**	4	5	**1**	2	**3**	4	5

Table 5.1: The Musical and Dancer's rhythmic phrases

Pertinent to the number is the visual styling of Minnelli: the dancers dressed in muted browns and taupes, have splashes of colour through red tights and yellow and blue ribbons for the women for one group of dancers, and green and yellow tights for the other group. Astaire appears in a taupe jacket and cream trousers with two-tone brogues on his feet. Bremer stands out in a bright yellow skirt with white petticoats and an off-the-shoulder cream blouse and red belt. This colour pallet is significant in that it contrasts against the swirls of the black and white floor which creates an hypnotic feel as the dance progresses (see *figure 5.4*). The black and white theme is a visual element that Minnelli would later use in the ballet sequence for *An American in Paris*.

Figure 5.4: The striking black and white floor with the colour pallet of the dancers

The camera establishes a crowded floor scene with actors dressed in colour carnival costumes, the crowd disperses to reveal the floor space, as the cheers of onlookers subsides the feet of the dancers can be seen entering both from the left of the screen and at the far back of the frame. A series of claps can be heard against the faint sound of a percussive rhythmic beat. A trio of female dancers come into full-shot executing a series of claps, flicked kicks, and steps. As the camera goes into close-up and follows their movement pattern in the space, other dancers begin to appear in the background. A male and female couple appear in the frame and take hold, they travel backwards in a series of walks and *step ball changes*, other couples appear in the frame and they move into a large circular group in the centre of the frame. As dancers intersect in and out of the circle the camera cuts to a frontal shot of one couple whose movement now incorporates lifts of the arms and more bodily movement. Whilst the dynamics and cross-phrasing of the claps continue, more instrumentation begins to come into play. Further dancers appear and they interweave with each other in straight lines with a series of *retires* and *step*

ball changes. The camera cuts to a longer shot which reveals a cluttered use of the space (see *figure 5.5)*, other than the bold red and yellow colours, this tighter formation gets somewhat visually blurred as the mute tones of the costumes do not offer much differentiation. The patterning reveals a circular outer group of dancers with a diagonal line of couples in the centre.

Figure 5.5: Group patterns of the dancers

This group of dancers move to the outer perimeter of the floor and four girls, with green costuming, appear and the shot changes to a full-screen close-up, the movement has now developed to incorporate 90-degree leg extensions with a high lift in the arms. With each phrase, alternate quartets join the group and due to the cross-phrased rhythm give the impression of a canon-like motif interweaving amongst each other. The male dancers join the group and in couples they interweave around each other now adding a hop into the motif. The camera has returned to an overhead shot and as the dancers move back it reveals Astaire and Bremer watching the dancers from the side. As the ensemble parts, a close-up of the couple

reveals Astaire clapping the infectious rhythm to the amusement of Bremer. There is a *tacet* in the music as Astaire, seemingly caught up in the pulse beat, spins Bremer around. With encouragement from the onlookers, Astaire and Bremer are thrust into the centre of the dance floor. The repeat the flick kicks and walks, slowly adding turns, as they take hold, Astaire leads Bremer around the floor alternating between the rhythms of 1&2 345, and 12 3&4 5 in a succession of turns and spins under each other's arms. The camera has followed the action in a full-body shot and reveals the ensemble have framed Astaire and Bremer in a semi-circle around the perimeter of the space.

Astaire and Bremer do one last spin towards the camera and both stop momentarily face on to each other. For no apparent reason the lighting becomes subdued upon the chorus who now almost appear in silhouette, the music becomes more lyrical and the chorus begin singing the lyrics, written by Freed. During this section Astaire and Bremer remain at the forefront of the screen in lighting which maintains their prominence. The clapping continues; however Astaire and Bremer have slowed in tempo and match the speed of the accompaniment. The ensemble continue to clap but the lilting nature of the lyrics suggests a displacement between time and space and gives the illusion that they are present but Astaire and Bremer have stepped into their own dream-like world oblivious to the group of observers around them. The suggestion here is that there is more unity between the characters within the plot, Astaire seems finally to concede to his love for Yolanda and they now dance in perfect unison demonstrating a harmonious resolution in the relationship. Throughout, the two dancers knowingly glance in each other's direction and give the allusion of trust and enjoyment in this seemingly private leave of absence from the carnival surroundings. The movement motif shows little development in terms of vocabulary, the rhythm allows for a series of steps, hops, kicks, spins that move across the both sides of the screen. For the first time in the number Astaire and Bremer stop clapping and take a ballroom hold, slowly the ensemble steps out of shot, their vocals still present and the clapping less prominent. Yolanda's trust in Astaire's character seems to have progressed with

more use of his body for support allowing for a greater use of leg extensions (see *figure 5.6*) and back bends. The quality of the movement here is much smoother and more fluid in opposition to the more disjointed off-beat phrases.

Figure 5.6: Bremer succumbing to Astaire

As Astaire and Bremer take their last position, Bremer is dipped to the floor with her leg extended upwards, the audience is thrust back to reality by a change in the lights and the dancers coming into frame with the same spirited energy from the start of the dance. The dancers fill the space and as the camera pulls back to a long shot Astaire and Bremer have exited the floor. The movement suggests a feel of the Jitterbug and Lindy hop with its flick kicks and close to the floor movement, they form a circular snake-like formation using *step ball changes* to move with more speed, gradually disappearing out of shot as Astaire and Bremer enter the frame again. Once again, the lighting becomes more subdued on the ensemble and places focus on the central characters. The drums become more prominent in the accompaniment as Astaire and Bremer repeat the step and kick motif playfully around each other, each clap signifying a

change in their alignment and positioning. Whilst their preceding duet section was more subtle, this section is more playful due to the upbeat energy and continual drive of the claps. Musically, a sudden inclusion of the brass instruments suggests a further progression in the relationship as Astaire takes hold of Bremer and moves her around the floor with more force and energy than exhibited previously. It is the first time there has been a significant alteration in the dynamics as the movement has more bounce through the legs and elevation between the pair. An exciting series of spin turns shows Astaire manoeuvring Bremer around the space, showing complete control in the movement. The last establishing shot sees Astaire and Bremer in the centre of the frame and the dancers are positioned on either side of the space at the front of the shot, directing the focus to the leads on a diagonal plane. A full orchestra lifts the dynamics and Astaire and Bremer revel in this lift with larger elevated movements. It is not only Bremer who has succumbed to Astaire, for Astaire has similarly conceded to her charms as demonstrated in the execution of a reverse *promenade* in which Astaire stands stationary with his leg in *attitude* and Bremer spins him around. This is a movement used earlier in *Broadway Melody of 1940* and would appear again *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949) and *Royal Wedding* (1951). They conclude the dance, kneeling into each other, no contact, but their bodies pressed forwards to each other in a show of complete affection.

As a narrative piece, the number serves very little purpose in perpetuating any of the themes or plot points of the film, however it does present a highly original and creative choreographic sequence that stands out from an otherwise underappreciated film. Although much of Loring's work with Charisse demonstrates his balletic style, the choreography here presents an unusual and interesting use of rhythms and musicality. The vocabulary of steps seldom change throughout both the group and duet work, yet the very progression of the cross-phrased rhythms and movement counterbalances a sense of repetition that would occur had the musical and dance counts been in tandem with each other. Loring's work, whilst creative, is subservient to the performances of Astaire and Bremer as the stars of the film. 'Coffee Time' certainly deviates

from the usual Astaire duet, but it is the rich mise-en-scéne created by Minnelli that is at the forefront of the camera lens. The movement content presents rudimentary steps that very rarely change. As an integrated piece that conveys a story, there is an element of the relationship tackled, but its inclusion does little more than exhibit a momentary lightness in the dramatic action. Loring's work, similar to Pan, became more identifiable through the dancers he showcased, this is evident in his work with Charisse who appeared to best encompass the ideas that Loring projected through the camera lens. It is a case here of the performer's style overriding that of the choreographer which limits the contribution to authorial credit in the resulting film.

5.3 Jack Cole

Jack Cole (b. 1914 – d. 1974), who only choreographed five pictures at MGM between 1940 and 1957, was one of the most influential and identifiable Hollywood choreographers, yet is least remembered in terms of his contributions to those few musicals he was involved with (Loney, 1984: 12). The majority of Cole's creative output was at the Columbia and 20th Century Fox studios where actresses including Grable, Monroe, Jane Russell and Mitzi Gaynor benefitted from his dance styling and techniques.

Cole's background in dance training was markedly different to any other choreographer at MGM; training at the age of sixteen with modern dance pioneers Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, dancing in the company of Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman and establishing himself as a concert dancer in the modern dance idiom (Valis-Hill, 2001: 31). The modern dance genre was far removed from the choreography that had been seen on screen in musical films up to the 1940s. With influences based in Indian, Balinese and African-American dance techniques, Cole developed a theatricalised integration of these many dance forms, accompanied by swing jazz music of the era, to develop a unique style that he presented in his New York nightclub acts with

his dance partner Alice Dudley (Loney, 1984: 74). Gaining notoriety for the eclectic merger of 'world' dances, Cole was employed by Columbia studios in 1944 as a dance director forming one of the only dance ensemble units in Hollywood (Billman, 1997: 268). A selective group of dancers trained daily in the Cole method which dance historian Constance Valis-Hill described the process as:

> Working six hours a day, six days a week, the company began with Humphrey-Weidman-styled stretching and strengthening exercises on the floor and progressed to the drilling of routines in Cole's so-called Indian, Latin, and swing styles.
>
> (Valis-Hill, 2001: 32)

Members of his dance ensemble included Gwen Verdon, Buzz Miller, Alex Romero and Carol Haney who had successful careers as both performers and assistant/sole choreography duties in Hollywood. Cole's contribution to dance on film, with the emphasis of exoticism in the movement vocabulary, often attracted the attention of the film censors and resulted in changes, or in some instances, the deletion of a choreographed number. Cole resisted the restraints placed on his work and did not enjoy the conformity that he, and his dancers, were required to adhere to. Cole commented:

> They had the most elaborate kind of censorship. One was that my navel showed and you couldn't show signs of physical birth, which was truly idiotic. You were supposed to cover it with transparent tape, put body makeup over it so that you had some strange kind of abdomen.
>
> (Cole in Delamater, 1982: 113)

Whilst Cole challenged the restraints that the Hollywood Production Code enforced on filmmakers, he did little to fight for it during his Hollywood career. Dancer Chase, who assisted Cole at MGM, observed:

> I worked for him for a year and a half. Jack was like a horse that got to the finish line and lost by the nose. He would never fight for anything when it came to film, and they cut and slashed and slaughtered his work. It was so much better in the rehearsal hall and he never fought.
>
> (2014)

In many writings about Cole, he is referred to as the 'Father of Jazz Dance' which according to Valis-Hill is a title that Cole refused to accept stating 'the idea that some people have that I am

in some way responsible for the 'modern jazz movement of today is in itself a distortion' (Cole cited in Valis-Hill, 2001: 30). Yet, Cole's specific style is one of the fore-bearers of the emergence of the theatrical jazz dance style. Theatre scholar Glenn Loney described Cole's definition of jazz dance as 'anything unsophisticated, danced to jazz music, as long as the movement corresponded to the style of the music, could be called jazz' (Loney, 1984:120). Cole established a movement vocabulary that responded to the rhythmic dynamics of the music, using the beats within the bar to define and dictate the quality of the movement. Within the style there is no reference to the lengthened and held posture of ballet, the movement is grounded and the body shaped to allow the music to be expressed throughout the body as a whole. Jazz dance often explores the rhythms of the music in more depth, similar to tap dancing, by utilising the complex note values within each bar of music. In defining the Cole style Boross describes the following characteristics:

> A partial list would include dancing in plié; with isolated body movements; with compressed or stored energy; and with a keen sense of manipulating rhythm, spatial levels, and attack.
>
> (Boross, 2010)

These core elements of the theatrical jazz dance genre became more noticeable in musical films and stage productions of the 1960s and 1970s. In part due to teachings of both Cole and his dancers, who like disciples, passed on their learning in dance studios all over the world. Matt Mattox, a Cole dancer who established a successful teaching career in the US and Europe, developed his own training based on his experience with Cole, whilst formulating a technique that is still taught today. Similarly, the work of director-choreographer Fosse is heavily credited to the styling of Cole. Chase, who danced in Hollywood during the decline of movie musical production and during the evolution of jazz dance on screen observed:

> Without Jack [Cole] and Gwen [Verdon] there would be no Bob Fosse … and that's because of the influence of Jack then Gwen and eventually the work of Bobby himself. There is no question that Bob sucked Jack Cole out of Gwen – it is as clear as the nose on my face … Bobby added sex appeal and humor to Jack's work, which Gwen took to like a tea.
>
> (Chase, 2014)

Similarly to Cole, Fosse established a style of theatrical jazz dance that continues to be utilised in musical theatre.

Cole's work on *Les Girls* (1957) is significant for a number of reasons; it would mark the last MGM musical starring Kelly and would be the only picture of the 1950s in which Kelly would not choreograph, as well as the last screen musical of composer and lyricist Cole Porter. It would also be the first time Kelly, whose own performance and choreographic style is so identifiable, would be working alongside another choreographer with such a specific style and influence in their movement. Cole stated that he wanted to give movement that would go against the Kelly mould and have a more 'sophisticated' look (Cole cited in Hirschhorn, 1974: 254). However, this forced elegance was the very stylistic trait Kelly had distanced himself from. Cole was evidently not impressed with Kelly as a dancer and dismissed his abilities stating, 'when you get ahead with not very much, you get very protective of how to hide the fact that you don't know how to do very much, that your means are not very great' (Cole cited in Delamater, 1981: 197). Kelly's own performance style and choreographic methods are discussed in the following chapter.

Les Girls starred Kelly alongside dancers Mitzi Gaynor, Taina Elg and non-dancing actress Kay Kendall. Its part backstage story concerns a court case based on the libellous memoirs of Kendall's character, who alongside Gaynor and Elg were part of a nightclub act with Kelly. The story made room for performance numbers such as the title song 'Les Girls' discussed here. Choreographically the number encapsulates the many influences that made Cole's choreography so recognisable, from the Indian costuming and articulated body movement, to its Latin and jazz rhythms. The opening shot introduces the viewer to a poster for the performance act, the camera takes an overheard shot of a beige soundstage with multilevel platforms containing four dancers in the same West Indian attire. They rapidly turn on the spot and throw their bodies towards the floor. Three females ascend up a staircase dressed in tight

fitting strapless dresses and elaborate black headdresses that suggest weaved hair that is shaped like a totem drum –their skin colour suggests a heavy use of dark body make-up to emphasise these influences are non-western (see *figure 5.7*).

Figure 5.7: An assortment of Cole dancers

Kelly appears on a podium dressed in a black dinner suit, bow tie, a straw boater and cane – all elements of costume not typically associated with the Kelly persona (discussed further in Chapter 6). The boater seems representative of Kelly's non-conformity to the sophisticated air of the upper class and also pays tribute to French singer and film-star Maurice Chevalier. Kelly is in full-shot and addresses the audience whilst singing the song directly into the camera. As Kelly sings the chorus and begins to ascend further up the stairs, the dancers seen in the opening shots pass by him in groups or singly, the only addition is an Asian dancer who carries two fans in front of her. At the highest point of the stairs, Kelly sits down whilst three dancers move on a podium. Their movement utilises the jazz *port de bras* which is more angular than its balletic

equivalent and the foot and leg work has a sharp rhythmic quality. Throughout the remainder of the number all of the ensemble dances are placed within shot demonstrated various aspects of Cole's movement vocabulary. Dance scholar Teal Darkenwald identifies specific characteristics of the Cole style such as:

- Catlike, slinky, sensual movement
- Erect torso, regal spine
- Supple arm movements initiating from the back and shoulder

(Darkenwald in Guarino and Oliver, 2014: 87)

Kelly descends what is now a circular staircase and three panels in the wall rotate to reveal Gaynor, Kendall and Elg in white circular head pieces and gloves, and long white wraparound capes with a rust coloured lining visible in sections of the cape. Kelly engages with each of the performers individually and they surround him, singing parts of the chorus. As they reach the conclusion of the song, Kelly steps forward onto the apron of the stage and follows three female dancers off-screen, at the same time the camera tracks in to focus on Gaynor, Kendall and Elg on-stage. The music at this point crescendos with a strong vamp in the brass and percussive instruments initiating the three to strut across the stage. The movement here, beyond walking, is gestural and utilises very pronounced extensions of the arms, wrists and hands. This over-exaggerated gestural movement is a stylistic trope that was utilised in Cole's earlier work with non-dancers Monroe and Russell. The three women eventually strut forwards down three gangways from the stage and throw their capes into the audience. They continue to step around the stage with exaggerated arm movements before strutting back up their gangways.

The orchestra segues into a Latin themed rhythm, a spotlight picks out Kelly stationary on an upstage platform and the three dancers run towards him. Changing to a closer sideways shot of Kelly, Gaynor continues the run up the stairs to join him on the platform. Gaynor throws her hat behind the set and engages in a duet with Kelly. As she circles the still stationary Kelly, there is an element of cat-and-mouse play in their interaction. Influenced by the Latin rhythms, Gaynor's footwork includes greater movement of the hips, whilst Kelly remains more rigid in his

response. Small jumps and on the spot turns, restricted by the space on the podium, enable Kelly and Gaynor to circle one another before moving forwards onto another podium and take hold of one other. Continuing the thematic play between the dancers, more depth is incorporated by utilising both podiums and the sharp accents in the music are sometimes echoed by movement of the arms. A sudden change in the lightning to a dark red hue initiates Gaynor to run towards the camera and out of shot and Kelly steps into a double inwards *pirouette* before landing on his knees and the lights go to black.

The instrumentation changes suddenly from the Latin rhythm to the strong downbeats of the drum section, the lights come up to reveal Elg and two female dancers behind her. They step up to the same podium with a series of strong and articulate *port de bras* movements going between first and second positions and an exaggerated use of the shoulders and flexed wrists. As the camera pulls back to reveal the full-bodies of the dancers, Elg sits in a *plié* whilst her pelvis undulates and moves with the rhythmic quality of the drums. The *port de bras* motif continues as Elg and the two dancers turn and jump inverting the feet and legs whilst throwing the arms up high. Two more dancers join and Elg leads them down the stairs on the stage, the camera pulls back to a wider shot and the Asian fan dancers cross from left to right. As Elg continues to cross the stage, Kelly enters and the camera changes to a front shot of Kelly. The dynamics build here as the reed and brass instruments fill the accompaniment. Kelly's movement is more grounded and rooted in the use of *plié*. A series of *ball changes* both to the side and forward and back see him change directions quickly (see *figure 5.8*). The four girls mimic the movement but continue to execute the *port de bras* from the previous sections. Some of the movement references Kelly's earlier 1952 work in *Singin' in the Rain*, however the inclusion of a double *tours en l'air* is not a balletic step frequently utilised by Kelly as is his pirouette in a low *plié* that he finishes almost on the floor. Kelly and the female dancers continue to repeat the motif before hitting an arrested line with one hand extended upwards and the other extended out to the side, their focus to the left of the screen is initiated by a sharp turn of the head away from the audience and the

camera follows with a cut to the side of the stage showing Elg, Kendall and Gaynor standing by the proscenium arch.

Figure 5.8: Kelly 's solo work choreographed by Cole

The music returns to the earlier song and the three women perform directly to the camera using the gestural movement from the start of the dance. As Kendall was the only non-dancer in the group it can be assumed that this influenced the choreography at this point, especially as she is not featured in the dance section. The three groups of dancers are posed in the camera shot at differing levels, each executing movements influenced by their costuming and poise. Gaynor, Kendall and Elg are revealed, having lost their black dresses and now in gold fitted leotards and shawls with fur edging. They strut forwards and backwards as Kelly jumps over the orchestra and slides across the apron to finish by the proscenium arch as the three leads continue to walk towards him. They walk back towards the centre of the stage, Kelly follows and strikes a pose with his boater held at a right angle at waist level and his foot crossed over the other.

Elg, Kendall and Gaynor stand centre in poses with their arms thrown high and the three sets of dancers are positioned on various levels of the podiums and stairs on the right-hand side of the screen. The stage curtain flies in to signal the end to the number.

As a piece of narrative dance, this number does little to signify any major plot development other than establishing the four lead characters as performers and the type of act they had. The stylistic quality contained in the movement is significant, despite the audience knowing the location of the theatre is sent in France, Cole's interest in other cultural forms of dance elevate this dance from the standard Westernised movement that has dominated musical theatre and film since its inception. There is no reason for Latin inspired music, or Asian or West Indian inspired costuming, however it provides what essentially is a non-descript show-within-a-show number with something unique and altogether different from other choreographers of the same period. Its inclusion within this chapter is to emphasise the influence that individual style can have on the status of a musical number, if the style of movement resonates strongly enough it permeates more deeply in the overall 'look' of the musical than the regimented and repetitious examples from the early choreographers. It is also Cole's overall design for the number that stands out, cultural influences pervade through other creative elements such as the costuming and music. The Cole aesthetic is much more predominate than his other contemporaries due to the fact the entire dance number is conceived based upon the influences that are articulated throughout Cole's choreography.

Kelly fundamentally performs as Kelly always has done however, his ability to execute another's choreography pushes his limits, and not always successfully. Cole's style, both technically and aesthetically, is more fluid in parts and more articulated in others than any work that Kelly had previously performed. Cole's choreography signifies an important juncture in the authorship of choreographic work, his own individual style is so prominent in the movement produced that it stands out from the overall visual elements of the film. Its integration into the diegesis of the

film is limited, but such a strong stylistic element in the dance content opens the possibilities for Cole's consideration in the authorship debate. Cole's significant contribution to dance during the MGM musicals is because of his influence on other choreographers at the time. His name is not as recognisable in the 21st century, in part, because Cole was not involved with any major dance pictures at MGM during his career. However, his influence, albeit by imitation, infiltrated the later work of choreographers who developed screen dance during the mid-1940s onwards.

5.4 Michael Kidd

Michael Kidd (b. 1919 – d. 2007) was a prolific Broadway choreographer who only worked at MGM on three films, yet his dances in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* are considered some of the finest examples of dance in musical film, which film critic A.H. Weiler in *The New York Times* reviewed as 'strikingly imaginative' (1954). Billman cited Kidd as 'one of the driving forces in the evolution of dance on Broadway and film' (Billman, 1997: 377), Kidd's contribution is often overlooked, despite working on some of the most successful musicals of the 1950s including *Guys and Dolls* (1950) and *Can-Can* (1953), progressing to the dual role of director-choreographer in the 1956 musical *L'il Abner*.

Kidd trained at the School of American Ballet, eventually appearing as a dancer with Loring's ballet company and dancing for five years with Ballet Theatre until 1947. His first choreographic credit on Broadway was the 1947 production *Finian's Rainbow* (Billman, 1997: 377). Kidd's style is epitomised by the integration of dance and acrobatics working in unison. Delamater suggests that 'Kidd exploits that relationship [between dance and acrobatics] to enhance each one, crossing the arbitrary line between the two' (Delamater, 1981: 122) which becomes particularly noticeable in the 'Barn Dance' sequence in *Seven Brides* and in the later film adaptation of *Hello, Dolly!* (1969). Whilst acrobatic movement has long been used in musical and film choreography, it was employed as a speciality rather than integrated with jazz

dance vocabulary. The technical skills of the seven dancers in *Seven Brides* allowed Kidd to emphasise the physical prowess of the dancers. Dancer Fred Curt, who appeared in the film as one of the seven suitors who compete for attention of the seven brides in the 'Barn Dance', stated that in rehearsals:

> Michael would often throw in acrobatic movement within the choreography. It was an expectation of the dancers he selected. We had a running joke where he would ask for an aerial [a movement that involves suspending the body in the air whilst swinging each leg in the air resulting in a hovering effect before landing] and one of us would say "Michael could you show us?" and he would because he could demonstrate every step that he choreographed.
>
> (Curt, 2015)

Kidd's practical experience, combined with knowledge of working both in the ballet and musical theatre worlds garnered respect from those that worked with him. Rall, a dancer in *Seven Brides*, acknowledges that:

> Michael was a choreographer from the ballet and had a concept of how a number should go. He would build it in excitement and certain people would have certain characters that he would give them certain steps to do at certain times which made it work. He was a very experienced choreographer and he knew how to build numbers. Again you need to get somebody with a wide variety of experience in order to make musicals work.
>
> (1996)[46]

In comparison to the early dance directors, Kidd employed a range of differing dance vocabularies drawing from ballet, jazz and tap dance within his choreographic style. More than any other MGM choreographer, Kidd's choreographic style presents movement that pushes the physical limitations of his dancers whilst remaining faithful to the film's period and setting.

As a choreographer during the 1950s, Kidd was one of the few who worked consistently between both the medium of stage and film. In a 1968 interview, Kidd explained:

[46] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

> I don't see any difference between the two. All choreography is the same. The difference is only between the medium and the technique of presenting in its clearest form. On the stage a close-up[*sic*.] and a long shot simultaneously – the audience if you're sitting in the twelfth row you're always twelve rows away from the stage and if you're looking at a stage full of people or if you're looking at a single person on the stage, the distance is all the same … In a movie you do this by different devices – you can move in closer with the camera so that instead of being twelve rows away you can be one row away and the attention can be focused more precisely …
>
> (Kidd, 1968)[47]

It is important to note that during the latter films of Kidd's career, including *Seven Brides,* were filmed in the CinemaScope process that allowed for the viewing of pictures in widescreen. This format provided a filmic space that mirrored the full width of a proscenium arch stage typical of all Broadway musicals.

Kidd's first screen assignment was on *The Band Wagon* choreographing for Astaire and Charisse. Whilst gymnastic movement is not evident, the choreography for Astaire is remarkably different to his usual performance style and demonstrated a greater jazz dance influence. On his working relationship with Astaire, Kidd stated:

> Fred requested me to do this picture…he was uneasy about it, because I came from a different world. I didn't move the way he moved, I didn't think the way he thought. I didn't have the same background that he had. He used to sit next to me all day during rehearsal to see what I did… I would get up and improvise a movement and he would say "gee Mike, I don't know if I can do that".
>
> (1995)[48]

Kidd ultimately discovered that his best process for creating the choreography was to do it in the evening when Astaire had gone home. By the time he returned to the studio next day, Kidd would pretend to improvise using the dancers showing Astaire what had been created the night

[47] Jack Hirshberg Papers 1953-1980, Margaret Herrick Library
[48] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

before. This method gave Astaire enough confidence in Kidd's choreography to execute all of the movement he was given to do.

'The Girl Hunt Ballet', a spoof of film-noir detective drama based on a Mickey Spillane story, presents Astaire as a detective and Charisse, in a number of different guises, as the object of his affection. The basis of dance satirises the overarching narrative of the 'high-art' ballet world, with the 'low-art' of musical comedy and several numbers reflect this battle between Astaire's character as the *hoofer* and Charisse as the ballet dancer. Charisse described the experience of Astaire working with Kidd as one of caution, since stylistically they represented very different dance vocabularies. However, Charisse stated:

> He [Astaire] was very sceptical at times. He would set it up before Fred came in. So then when Fred came in he had everything ready to go … Fred respected him greatly.
>
> (2004)[49]

Kidd was particularly focused on the integration of dance and its ability to aid the film narrative and its characters. Kidd believed that:

> A dance routine without emotional content is like an oil painting serving as the dust jacket on a book of blank pages … It is not mere coincidence that these are usually the simple, intimate scenes and not the great mass spectacles. I try to do in dance form what the director does with the book portions of the show.
>
> (Kidd, 1953)[50]

On being told about developing dances for *Seven Brides* by the director Stanley Donen, Kidd retorted:

> I made it very clear that these people c*annot* dance. They live in a house with horseshit on the floor, cows and pigs coming in and out of the place, they're crude slobs. And now you tell me you want dancing?
>
> (Kidd cited in Silverman, 1996: 189)

[49] *The Masters Behind the Musicals* (2004), DVD Documentary
[50] Jack Hirshberg Papers 1953-1980, Margaret Herrick Library

Ultimately, Kidd's dances helped establish the film as an MGM classic musical, despite the fact the studio thought the film was considered a B-picture, and won the Oscar for Best Score (Silverman, 1996: 197).

The 'Barn Dance' from *Seven Brides* remains one of the most memorable dance sequences on film, in part because of the spectacular acrobatics and tenacity of the dancers but also because it is one of the rare male dominated numbers from a screen musical. Twelve men compete throughout the dance for the affection of the six women and the cast included some of the most talented dancers and gymnasts in Hollywood including Rall, Tamblyn, Mattox, Marc Platt, and New York City Ballet dancer Jacques D'Amboise, who were cast as the Pontipee Brothers. Jeff Richards was the last brother but he did not dance therefore is never involved in the dance sequences beyond observing the action. Despite Kidd's misgivings for the purpose and motivation for dance in the film, he needed to justify the reasons for these characters to dance. On integrating dance in musicals, both stage and film, Kidd stated:

> I feel it's very important, for me anyway, to have the dancers has an integral part of the plot structure of a stage show or of a movie. I believe just a dance that is abstract movement will not hold the audience's interest, maybe its because it doesn't hold my interest and I can't do it with enthusiasm.
>
> (Kidd, 1995)[51]

Kidd further clarified why he placed the importance on dance in terms of characterisation and development by stating:

> In *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* we tried to make each musical number a plot point to advance the story, emotionally, also musically with the sight of dance and movement. Also, I've tried taking out 4 excerpts, or 5, excerpts of musical numbers from 7 Brides, and run them one after another. You can see the clear progression of the emotional plot point just by looking at those musical numbers. Now one of the reasons, I believe, is that the people in it have to be real people, not just dancers.
>
> (Kidd, 1995)[52]

[51] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center
[52] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

Whilst he had misgivings about the dance motivation, there is a correlation with the characters in *West Side Story* (1957) which focuses on a group of young teens. Both character groups are uneducated and generally lacking in the ability to convey emotion through text, dance serves as a means through which they can demonstrate their internal feelings, frustrations and in the case of the 'Barn Dance' assert their status amongst the townsfolk in the musical.

Set in Oregon in 1850, square dancing was a substantial part of the social structure across north America, with country dances dating back to the European ballrooms according to historian Bob Skiba (1997: 220). Whilst Skiba's article on social dancing focuses on Minnesota, it paints a vivid picture of the importance of dance to social gatherings and in introducing eligible men and women to each other. Whilst social dance has significantly changed in the 21st century, the state of Oregon still recognises and celebrates its square dance traditions with 64 clubs that promote the recreational activity (squaredance.gen.or.us). Kidd expressed concerns about creating a square dance stating to director Donen: 'no one wants to look at square dancing. That's a dance for participants, not for observers. Its not for an audience' (1995)[53]. He proceeded to request items that would be found at a barn raising from the props department and began to experiment with what could be achieved with planks of wood, wood saws and axes. Part of the success of the number Kidd attributes to the characters created by the actors stating:

> A key factor in making the number work was the character of the boys, they had to have definable characters. Just seven anonymous dancers wouldn't be interesting. The audience would not identify with any of them and they did break themselves up very neatly all the way through the picture.
>
> (1995)[54]

Rall remembers that their characters were creating during the time they spent in the rehearsal room working on the barn raising number stating 'we became those characters on the screen,

[53] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center
[54] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

we became those characters off the screen. We didn't have to think about it, we were already there, already doing it all day.' (Rall, 1996)[55]. Rall explains how Kidd would give certain characters specific steps and knew how to build a musical number. He would ask the dancers for their input in certain 'tricks' and incorporate that into the finished product (Rall, 1996)[56].

On arriving at the barn raising, the brothers demonstrate their new manners and ability to converse more eloquently with the local women, much to the amusement of their older brother Adam, who was not part of their earlier courtship lessons. The dance focuses on the rivalry between the male townsfolk and the brothers fighting for the attention of the women in attendance. As the fiddle player warms up, the townsmen and women are brought up to the floor of the barn to begin the square dance. The orchestra joins the fiddles and provides a jaunty upbeat melody that emphasises the strings of the violins. The townsmen are dressed in formal attire, a multitude of smart jackets and trousers with dress shoes. The women wear an assortment of colourful gingham check dresses with white petticoats. The Pontipee brothers are clearly distinguished by the bold colours of their shirts and their brown trousers tucked into their boots. The more casual attire of the brothers makes a statement about the class divide, one which underpins their ensuing battles. As the dance progresses, the suitors and their respective partners form two lines to face each other, the women holding their skirts stretched forwards as both lines bend and stretch their knees. They walk towards each other and step back before walking around each other and back in to line, the women continue to hold their skirts while the townsmen have a stiff and lifted posture in their stance. As the Pontipee brothers stand and observe, one of the women knowingly moves her glance to Platt's character and the women acknowledge that they are enjoying the glances from their spectators. The townsmen quickly walk forward and offer their arms to the women, they turn and walk in single file before springing in to the air. The quality of the movement is very formal with a taut pull through the

[55] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center
[56] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

knees and legs, they all move with a regimented adherence to the strict tempo. Throughout the next section the brothers continue to vie for the attention of the women and find opportunities to take the place of the townsmen. As the women step away to curtsey, the camera angle changes, the brothers spot an opportunity to interject and they rush in to sweep the women into their arms. As they dance, the dynamics in the movement take a step up, a marked contrast to the rigid and formal mood established with their suitors. The contest between the brothers and the townsmen has now been established and there are two further exchanges of partners amongst the two groups of men. A recurring motif of leg extensions with a flexed foot, and sharp lean of the body from the waist become associated with sections in which the women dance with the brothers (see *figure 5.9)*.

Figure 5.9: The brothers and partners in their sharp and angled body lines.

As the townsmen once again make claim to their women, they *do-si-do* around the outer perimeter of the dance floor, while the overhead shot of the camera gives the suggestion that

the townsmen have herded the brothers like cattle. A close-up reaction shot of the brothers suggests a fight is to ensue, recognising their frustration, Powell runs in to dance with Rall. Powell spins with effortless grace and is flipped into the air with ease by Rall, Powell then pushes Platt and Tamblyn forward and two willing women step forward to partner up. Sensing their opportunity, the two men clap and jump into a cartwheel as the women spin into the men and jump into a double *attitude* lift before being thrown into the air with one leg extended forward. The remaining brothers, D'Amboise, Rall and Mattox, repeat the cartwheel before jumping into an *attitude* jump, three other women run in and whilst airborne rotate themselves into a lift with their backs against the front of the brothers, the three dancers repeat the previous couples lift which sees them propelled in the air with one leg extended forward (see *figure 5.10*).

Figure 5.10: The women lifted by the brothers

The use of lifts here, which have not been executed by the suitors, further enhances the conflict, and status of the two male groups. The suitors are formal, proper in their approach to square dance etiquette, in contrast the brothers are not versed in the formalities and therefore break tradition whilst emphasising their masculine appeal to the women. The townsmen compete with a more impressive use of leaps and turns which gains the attention of their corresponding female partners who respond with a kick and turn ending with them curtseying to their partner who has bowed. In a further show of virility, three of the brothers leap-frog over the suitors and pick the girls up for another *do-si-do* which leads them off the dance floor and onto the dirt floor where picnic tables have been set up. They step up onto the table with a presentation of their arms to their female partners who in turn are lifted on the table and cartwheel over the men's heads to the floor.

Figure 5.11: Rall demonstrating his aerial skills

It is the next few sections where Kidd's experimentation in the rehearsal studio comes into place. He utilises an array of props that are not out of place in terms of the setting and location, each prop designed to give a different degree of challenge between the two groups of men. Rall jumps up onto a log spinner and appears to be able to defy gravity by running on the log whilst it is spun, Kidd confirmed that Rall was suspended by invisible wires to maintain his balance (see *figure 5.11*) (Silverman, 1996: 191). Unchallenged, Rall jumps off the spinner and throws his body into a front *aerial* momentarily hovering in the air before landing. Two further challenges between the brothers and the townsmen ensues including dancing across wooden beams and jumping with an axe. These three competitive sections maintain a common theme, each brother is always victorious in their attempts to out dance the suitors as each of them demonstrate skilful acrobatic movements with proficient ease.

There follows another series of exchanges in which the townsmen and brothers continue to challenge each other for the affection of the women. Utilising the props a suitor beckons the brothers to jump onto two beams of wood to engage in an arm wrestling contest. Mattox and Platt fail to survive the contest and Rall jumps up to claim victory, he is forced into a very low *knee drop* before recovering and throwing the suitor off balance. Four further suitors jump up to challenge Rall, in a choreographed phrase they both take a wrestle hold, step and kick the leg and then jump to change positions as which point Rall knocks them off balance. To lighten the mood, and further contribute to the camaraderie between the brothers Platt steps up to challenge Rall, who is so intensely focused does not realise, until they both laugh about it. They execute a series of *trench* like movements before calling over Mattox and D'Amboise to join them on the two planks for a series of runs on the spot and low flicks of the legs with the arms thrown out (see *figure 5.12*). This continued unity from the brothers reinforces the familial bond demonstrated throughout the number.

Figure 5.12: Mattox, D'Amboise, Platt and Rall united

As the brothers jump off, a change to a frontal shot reveals Tamblyn who executes a series of lively handsprings across the beams and then springs into a backwards somersault landing with perfect placement across the beams. D'Amboise and Platt run into the shot and cartwheel over the planks, this sideways display of movement facilitates Rall suddenly appearing at the end of the planks without being noticed. Rall jumps up on the beams and executes three perfectly controlled *aerials*, each landing results in a quick cut to a new camera shot to demonstrate his control and precision in the movement.

Four of the brothers lift four women on to the beams who are in turn pulled away by their suitors, the camera cuts back to the dance floor and reveals the six suitors and their partners in a more spirited version of the *do-si-do*, seemingly inspired by the brothers they now repeat the lifts from earlier in the dance. The orchestra at this point is full-bodied and celebratory in its tone

signal the climax of the dance. The six brothers step up on the dance floor and observe the action with their hands placed into their belt buckles in an intimidating line, their expressions suggest their frustration at not winning the affections of their respective female partners. As the suitors and women curtsey and bow to each other, the emphasis in the use of fiddles suggests a sudden flirtatious spark in the women. They run towards the brothers, glance back at the suitors as if to question their actions and on the last beat jump into the arms of the brothers as if to affirm their allegiance. Throughout this dance sequence the narrative has been propelled forward, it is the events of the barn-raising which provides the catalyst for the remainder of the film. Kidd staged several numbers within the film that set not only the tone and mood of the piece but also contributed to the development of the characters, without resulting in movement that has no purpose.

In a rare occasion for a choreographer, Kidd also appeared in the 1955 MGM musical *It's Always Fair Weather* alongside dancers Kelly, Dan Dailey and Charisse. Whilst Kelly and Donen were credited as choreographers, Kidd's casting allowed the opportunity for the choreographer to be seen in action. Kidd's involvement as a choreographer with MGM may have been brief, but his contributions are no less significant due to both the success of the films financially and artistically.

Kidd's ability to integrate dance to have purpose to the narrative is more developed than the other choreographers discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Whilst Cole demonstrated a significant personal style in his movement, his dance did not fully integrate with the narrative, and so whilst his filmic work at MGM provides a body of accomplished work, Cole's numbers standalone, similar to the work of Pan and Loring. Kidd's work in *Seven Brides* demonstrates a greater awareness of the power of dance, and in essence his dances further the direction of the plot and the emotional content of the characters, resulting in a seamless transition between text, music and dance. Kidd's style, which does not have the individuality of Cole, possesses enough

individuality to assert the identifiable characteristics as outlined in Sarris' auteur theory. Kidd's style offers recurring motifs, particularly in the jazz dance idiom and the incorporation of acrobatic movement which distinguish his choreography from his other contemporaries. Kidd's sensibilities as a choreographer suggest why he would eventually assume the dual role of choreographer-director as his overall understanding of dance and storytelling aid the progression of the film and characters.

Within a time frame of less than 30 years, dance in MGM musicals benefitted not only from technological advancements in filming dance numbers, but also provided a visual history of the growth in dance techniques. The legacy of the choreographers discussed in this chapter is preserved in a visual record that allows for re-evaluation of the important contribution that these individuals made. The work of Pan, Loring, Cole and Kidd significantly highlight the ability for the choreographer to elevate the dance content beyond mere spectacle, and in some instances, make personal statements in their movement motifs. Chapter 6 explores the line between the actor-auteur and the actor that choreographs.

Chapter 6: 'Gotta Dance!': The Male Dancers at MGM

More than any other studio producing musicals during the Golden Age, MGM had a significant supply of dancers who starred in films under contract. Whilst Warner Brothers had Ruby Keeler and 20th Century Fox had Grable, the MGM roster included Kelly, Powell, Astaire, Charisse, Miller, Debbie Reynolds, Jane Powell, Vera-Ellen, Leslie Caron, Esther Williams[57] and Marge and Gower Champion. Whilst not as well remembered beyond film musical aficionados, other contracted dancers who appeared in featured roles included Rall, Tamblyn, Bobby Van and a young Fosse. Although more considered for their singing talents, actresses Jane Powell and Reynolds also proved adept dancers, partnering the likes of Astaire and Kelly in *Royal Wedding* and *Singin' in the Rain* respectively. During the studio system, at some point every film star under contract could be required to sing or dance if the role required it. Clark Gable performed the Irving Berlin classic 'Puttin' on the Ritz' in *Idiots Delight* (1939), James Stewart danced alongside Powell in *Born to Dance*, Joan Crawford, who was a Charleston dancer in the 1920s, was featured alongside Astaire in his first picture *Dancing Lady* (1933). In 21st century musical theatre education, the emphasis is placed on 'Triple Threat' training (acting, singing and dancing) to ensure an all-rounded performer, but 80 years prior to this, MGM ensured that all their stars demonstrated versatility across the range of talents which they brought to the screen.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the development of the 'star system', which, entwined with the studio system discussed in chapter 3, manufactured persona as something that became a recognisable trait characterised by a long succession of film actors during the golden age of film musicals, including the dapper sophistication of Astaire or the more down to earth athleticism of Kelly. Whilst MGM controlled its filmic output and the working regimes of its stars very

[57] Esther Williams was primarily considered a swimmer, but is included in this list for her contribution to the art of synchronised swimming and the water ballets that were featured throughout her filmic career. Williams, Caron, Reynolds, Vera-Ellen and Jane Powell, whilst all demonstrating their versatility as musical performers are excluded from the ensuing analysis predominately because they have not expressed (other than Williams' aquatic efforts) any indication that they were involved in the creative process of their dance work on screen.

carefully, this examination will also consider the actor as an auteur, particularly relevant in the focus here on stars that were primarily dancers. Whilst their star 'image' was closely controlled by the studio and its publicity department, many of these film stars were creative and in control of the dances and/or musical numbers that they performed on the screen. As a key determinant in their onscreen agency, each of the film stars discussed here will be considered an auteur based on their cinematic contributions. The body of work will frame the discussion to consider each dancer in terms of performance, and/or choreographic style, and the repetition and frequency of identifiable movement motifs in their screen dances. Utilising the framework for actor-auteurs as outlined by Dyer (1986a), each film star shall be examined against the criteria proposed.

6.1 The Star System

Embedded within the studio system discussed in Chapter 3 was the star system. Every film star of the era became the exclusive property of the studio which employed them. Crucial to the creation of the star system were the talent scouts who, employed by each studio, would travel to Broadway and survey the talent, also attending theatrical try-outs in Boston or Philadelphia, or theatres local to the Los Angeles area. Vaudeville, nightclub acts and radio would also serve as showcases for promising talent that could catch the eye of one of these talent scouts. Most performers were invited to film a screen test to see if they had a personality that was suited to the camera. If successful they would be signed to a seven-year contract, with 'options' at six month intervals that allowed the studio to release the performer if they proved unsuccessful or move to the next salary bracket if the studio felt there was mileage in the screen appeal and talent (Davis, 1993: 80-84).

Although coming towards the end of the studio system, Fosse's contract demonstrates clearly the way in which these options work. Signed on April 19, 1951, the contract states that Fosse was

exclusively contracted to the studio and was forbidden from obtaining any other form of work without written permission from the studio executives. The first six months of the contract was agreed at $500 per week for a minimum of 20 weeks per year. If extended the weekly salary was incremented as follows:

> To extend for a following 1 year $600 a week
> For the second year $750 a week
> For the third year $1000 a week
> For the fourth year $1250 a week
> For the fifth year $1500 a week
> For the sixth year $2000 a week
>
> (1951)[58]

Fosse's contract only outlined a six-year option plan, however in a letter dated May 22, 1952 from MGM it was confirmed that his contract did not actually commence until May 19, 1952. On October 18, 1952, Fosse received formal notice that his option had been extended for a further six months with his salary remaining at $500 per week. By 1953 Fosse was still contracted by the studio, but a September 14 memo amended the agreement to allow Fosse a leave of absence for six months in which he was granted permission to 'accept engagements for your own account in all fields of entertainment except television' (1953)[59]. The mention of television is pertinent at this point in time due to the studio's reluctance to accept this medium as growing in popularity. By 1954 Fosse had already accepted engagements as both a performer in revivals of *Pal Joey* in New York and as a choreographer on the musical *The Pajama Game*. What is striking about Fosse's contract is that he represents the many young actors who, whilst obtaining a studio contract, never achieved the stardom of their predecessors. In the eighteen months of his contract, Fosse appeared in three pictures, most notably *Kiss Me, Kate*. Fosse certainly fared better than many of these young actors by receiving supporting roles and was named in the on-screen credits, however Fosse is more remembered for his directorial and choreographic contributions in musical theatre than as a film star.

[58] Bob Fosse and Gwen Verdon Collection 1920-1991, Box 51A, Library of Congress
[59] Bob Fosse and Gwen Verdon Collection 1920-1991, Box 51A, Library of Congress

Astaire, whose career navigated through most of the major film studios, was not always under the control of a seven-year contract. His status by the 1940s, as a leading musical film star, enabled him to work for studios on a one or two picture contract. Following a successful reign at RKO from 1933 to 1939, Astaire freelanced, making a series of pictures for various studios. Whilst examples of MGM contracts have not been located, papers in the Paramount Pictures collection at the Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, indicate the pay structure that such status afforded, all of which demonstrate a noticeable difference to the Fosse example above. For the 1941 picture *Holiday Inn*, the contract reveals that Astaire was guaranteed a $5,000 per week salary for 20 weeks, $5,000 per week for any services required in addition to the 20 weeks, and a rate of $833.33 per day for any re-takes that were required. By 1949, Astaire's rate was set at $150,000 per picture. The figure was broken down as follows: $3,409.10 per week for a period of 22 weeks, after that for a period of four weeks any services required would be provided without remuneration. Any services after the 26-week period would be paid at $6,818.20 per week. The remaining 50 per cent of the agreed fee would be paid in instalments; $37,500 payable 90 days after the general release of the contracted film, and the remaining $37,500 payable one year after the release date (1941)[60]. A convoluted arrangement of fees, it demonstrates the power that Astaire's status commanded, and illustrates greater longevity in the financial security of Astaire to sustain a career and explains why he could periodically take extended breaks during his film career. Interestingly, in the budget breakdown for the MGM film *Silk Stockings*, his last MGM musical, the rate remained at $150,000 for the period of the picture, or at least a guarantee of $6,818 per week for 22 weeks (1957)[61]. It is rather telling of the decline of popularity in musical films that a star of Astaire's status, once his ascension was achieved, demonstrated little fluctuation or growth in the salary commanded. In 1941 Astaire netted a minimum of $100,000, rising to

[60] Paramount Pictures Production Records, Box 101, Folder 4, Margaret Herrick Library
[61] *Silk Stockings* Production Files, Box 21, Arthur Freed Collection, USC

$150,000[62] in 1949, a figure that remained frozen for the remaining eight years of his continual musical film output.

The financial remuneration of Kelly, whose musical film career was largely at MGM throughout the 1940s and 1950s, offers an interesting contrast to Astaire's. Their status as the reigning musical film stars was almost equal, and Kelly also graduated to become an influential director and choreographer by 1949, yet in terms of the financial package each received, there is significant disparity. For O*n The Town,* Kelly's first film with direction and choreography credits, alongside his assistant Donen, he received a flat fee of $59,333. His second film, *An American in Paris*, in which he starred and choreographed, netted him a weekly salary of $3,000 at a total cost of $15,750[63] for acting duties, his total payment for work on the picture included $65,000 in payment for creative duties, totalling $80,750 (1951)[64]. In contrast dancer Leslie Caron, who made her film debut in the picture, but was still the second lead alongside Kelly, received a total salary, for just over 22 weeks, of $9,200 for the entire picture.

These examples present an interesting juxtaposition in the contractual and financial arrangements of the studio system. On paper, as a freelance film star, Astaire (or more likely his agent) arranged a package that provided sustained financial security during, and after, the production period. Kelly, contracted as a leading film star at MGM, may have commanded less payment per picture, but had the financial security and a body of work (twenty feature films at MGM) that was consistent throughout the same period, albeit remaining active during Astaire's two retirement periods (1946-1948 and 1954-1957) Dancers under contract, such as Fosse and Caron, may have had the financial security of a studio contract, but salaries were significantly less than those of film stars who had reached the pinnacle of their career. Whilst

[62] Online calculators estimate this figure to be equivalent of $1.4million in 2015.
[63] This figure is equivalent to $155,000 for the duration of the film. The total figure paid would equate to $795,223 in 2015. Caron's salary equates to $90,601.
[64] *An American In Paris*, Budget Report, Arthur Freed Collection, USC

some of these fared well, Fosse is one of the examples who came to MGM as the decline of the film musical was in motion, and was not afforded the luxury of sustaining a filmic career.

6.2 The Star as Auteur

The previous chapter considered the role of the choreographer as an author of the work created however, later developments in the *auteur* theory have considered the role of the actor in terms of authorship. Dyer (1986a) and McGilligan (1982) have looked in greater depth at the actor-auteur and their contribution to the authorship of the films in which actors have appeared.

The purpose of the ensuing discussion is not to provide biographical information, which can be obtained from many printed and online sources[65], but to analyse the performance style and contribution of each dancer to the development of dance in film musicals. There has been increasing discussion, on the Internet especially, proposing the idea that film actors could be considered *auteurs,* particularly those actors whose characters share a similarity from one film to the next. Film critic Emanuel Levy, in particular, continued the debate and discussion about the movie star as auteur on his blog www.emanuellevy.com. Levy mentions stars such as Mae West, Greta Garbo and his own study of film western actor John Wayne, highlighting that various elements such as the typecasting of actors in specific roles throughout their career, or stylistic elements that follow from film to film, such as costume and performance styles. Whilst proposing that some of these elements provide a blueprint through which to identify authorship, Levy does question the legitimacy of such a theoretical lens. During the studio system era of the 1940s and 1950s, consideration must be paid to how much responsibility is placed on the studio

[65] There are many biographies that focus on the lives of the dancers discussed here, some personal memoirs, some focusing on the filmic output of each star, but limited focus on the work and stylistic tendencies of the performers themselves. Only Astaire, in the work of Stanley Green (1973) and John Mueller (1985), has received a more detailed analysis of his body of work. Two early books on Kelly (Clive Hirshhorn, 1972 and Tony Thomas, 1974), with which he was involved, seek to direct attention to his contribution to dance on screen. Books on Miller (Miller, 1972), Charisse (Charisse and Martin, 1976), Vera-Ellen (Soren, 1999) and Williams (Williams and Diehl, 1999) discuss more personal aspects of their lives both before and after their Hollywood careers, rather than their artistic contributions.

and its publicity department in building the public image as Levy points out in his blog entitled 'Auterism: Movie Stars as Auteurs' (2006). It is certainly apparent that MGM was adept at manufacturing film stars, but particularly in the film musical, the idea of personal and performance styles is arguably more indebted to the talent of the individual. As this chapter will identify, the dancers examined here were extraordinary; they rose from the ranks as contract players and headlined a multitude of musical films during their careers. Astaire and Kelly remain the most successful and most revered of male musical performers, significantly because their individual styles of movement and performance, as analysed in detail in the profiles below, are so identifiable and were not impersonated or recreated (at least on film) by any other performer. The work of McGilligan and Dyer expanded on the auteur theory in relation to actors, yet there is little scholarly writing that has continued the debate further in terms of the actor-auteur. Whilst its presence in newer writings on film studies may have been limited, there are continuing online discussions that consider other actors and their role of authorship as highlighted above.

Dyer (1986a, 1986b) published two studies exploring the concept of the Hollywood 'star' system and provides a theoretical framework through which to explore the development and perception of leading actors. His 1986 book *Stars* addresses the concept of the star as an author, although he emphasised that one must clearly define the parameters surrounding such an examination, in terms of making the distinction clear about a star's specific contribution to the production of the film. Dyer provides a rationale for the actor-auteur but makes clear that this is in reference to the image and performance element that an actor contributes to the film. He categorises the actor-auteur as thus:

1. Stars who had complete control over their image/performance
2. Stars who made a contribution to developing their image
3. Stars who were a disparate voice amongst many
4. Stars who were almost totally the product of the studio/Hollywood machine

(Dyer, 1986a: 175)

The role of the actor as auteur is certainly not a clear-cut category, but in utilising the framework above from Dyer, careful analysis can be applied. Astaire is most certainly a case for critical analysis, as he was both a performer and a creative force in the production of his movies, and would have contributed to the 'authoring' of his films in some form. McGilligan, who penned a study of film-noir actor James Cagney, proposed that 'certain actors – like certain writers and directors – have conclusively imposed their personalities on a life's output of filmmaking' (1982: 261). McGilligan suggests Astaire as one of the primary examples of a film star who should be considered an auteur. Acknowledging that Astaire had no directorial control and was packaged by the studio system according to the several studios that he worked for, McGilligan highlights that an Astaire film demonstrates consistency in the on-screen persona that is presented from film to film. McGilligan states:

> …Astaire knew that his movies existed in the main for *Astaire*, for those moments when he transcended their dull plotting. He [Astaire] simply cared less about their framework than about their essence. He reaped the advantages of a star arrangement that subordinated his writers and directors to an expression of his screen personality. His movies reflected his sensibility, primarily.
>
> (1982: 262)

Similarly, Kelly was as much an active participant in the creative process of many of his films, as he was a performer on screen. However, Kelly as an actor-auteur is an interesting case. Acknowledged and revered as both an actor and dancer, he was also credited as a choreographer and co-director on several films with director Donen. In exploring the case of authorship in the 21st century, Kelly was part of the Freed Unit, based at MGM and appeared in several film musicals of director Minnelli. It is here that the complicated web in auteur theory becomes somewhat tangled, and will take some deciphering in terms of identifying and making claims for authorship. It is certainly clear that Minnelli was no choreographer, but in terms of directorial mise en scène, careful consideration needs to be made when discerning between the visual style of the director and the visual style of the performer. However, in terms of Foucault's identification of authorial traits (discussed on page 47) the mise en scène of Kelly and Astaire,

is so prominent within both the performance and choreographic work that it maintains its own clear voice, one that is separate from the direction. Kelly, more than any other performer, maintains a certain distinction as he also achieved the status of film director by the late 1940s. However, as with Astaire, his collaborations with Minnelli, whose visual style is so predominant in his films, would continue into the 1950s. In making a claim for Kelly as an auteur, film scholar Gillian Kelly (2010) examines his work as a director and actor separately before aligning the two together. Throughout Kelly's career as an actor, it becomes apparent that, like Astaire, thematically his characters from film to film often had similarities or traits; Astaire was most presented as a performer and Kelly as a member of the US forces. This examination of Kelly as an auteur considers his multi-faceted career and contribution to dance on screen in terms of his performance style, use of props and involvement in developing filming techniques. Other than Astaire and Kelly, there are few analyses of other actors whose names are so closely linked with film musicals.

The following sections consider the actors - first and foremost dancers - who were regular featured performers in the MGM musical canon. Their work is discussed in terms of both performance quality and style, and their choreographic contributions and backgrounds in varying dance genres. Examples of their on-screen dance numbers are analysed to present a case for consideration in terms of authorship.

6.3 Fred Astaire

Fred Astaire (1899-1987) is still one of the most highly praised and celebrated film musical performers. Choreographers Balanchine and Robbins cited him as a genius and influence on their own work (Mueller, 1985: 3). Croce states that 'his [Astaire] "peerlessness" is a legend' and 'there were no other Astaires' (Croce, 1972: 6). Croce continues to analyse the contribution of the Astaire and Rogers film series to the development of dance on film suggesting, that whilst the narratives of the films may be insubstantial, the intimacy of their dance numbers provides

the audience with the necessary information, whilst never detracting from the sheer enjoyment of the couple dancing. Croce states:

> Their smooth, informal, light objectivity continues straight across the lines of reference, and since the weight of gesture seems no more than what the music of the moment deserves, we are free to enjoy dancing unpressured by extraneousness, as audiences of the Thirties were free.
> (Croce, 1972: 7)

Some 80 years have passed since his first on-screen appearance alongside Joan Crawford in the 1933 film musical *Dancing Lady*, yet Astaire's significant contribution to the art of dance on film seems enduring. A 2015 YouTube video by film preservationist Michael Binder, featuring excerpts from 66 dance films set to the music of artists Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars' collaboration 'Uptown Funk', received over 3million views within the first five weeks of being online. Whilst many of Hollywood's dancers are featured, there are a significant number of clips from Astaire solos and duets with Rogers, Charisse and Rita Hayworth. As a child performer, Astaire appeared alongside his sister Adele in vaudeville and by their late teens they were featured stars in musicals on Broadway and in London during the mid-1920s as discussed in theatre scholar Kathleen Riley's first in-depth study of the early stage work of Fred and Adele (2012). Upon sister Adele's marriage, Astaire continued as a soloist eventually receiving a film contract at RKO studios, although it was in a loan-out to MGM in which he made his film debut in 1933.

Following a successful screen partnership with Rogers from 1933 to 1939 consisting of nine musical films (and a later reunion at MGM in 1949 to make a tenth film together), Astaire returned to MGM in 1940 to star alongside Powell in *Broadway Melody of 1940*, albeit as a freelance artist as his next two films for MGM did not occur until *Ziegfeld Follies* and *Yolanda and the Thief*.

In Astaire's earlier musical numbers, dance evolves from the situation or is an extension of a preceding song where only movement can continue the musical dialogue further. *Ziegfeld Follies* is a tribute to the revue format of theatrical impresario Ziegfeld and each musical number is unrelated to the next; Astaire's two musical numbers are 'This Heart of Mine' and 'Limehouse Blues', both danced with Lucille Bremer, and contain a narrative that exists only in the time in which the numbers are presented. Additional numbers in the *Follies* film see Astaire introduce the audience to the film in the song 'Here's to the Girls', and a brief dance with new contract player Charisse, highlighting the significant focus placed on the use of women as objects for the audience's attention (discussed in the following chapter). An additional number features Astaire pairing alongside MGM's other song and dance man, Kelly. Whilst Astaire was firmly established as a film star, Kelly at this point was only beginning to ascend in his future as a leading film star, director and choreographer. Their duet, 'The Babbit and the Bromide', was the only time the two dancers danced on-screen together (until they co-hosted the MGM compilation film *That's Entertainment 2* in 1976) and presents an interesting relationship between two leading dancers with significantly different movement styles.

It is rare in an Astaire film that dance numbers are completely irrelevant to the plot. Two numbers that could be considered irrelevant are performed to an audience as spectators; most typically in 'Steppin' Out with My Baby' from *Easter Parade* and 'I Wanna Be a Dancin' Man' from *The Belle of New York* (1952). In both instances, Astaire is going through the act of performing before an audience, whilst his character within the film is the performer, they do not contribute anything to the development of the plot. In *Easter Parade*, the narrative clearly identifies Astaire as a successful Vaudevillian performer from the start and it is only the numbers with co-star Garland that have relevance to the plot as the narrative concerns their relationship both romantically and professionally as entertainers. In *The Belle of New York*, Astaire is playing a waiter at this particular plot point and his character takes to the stage to perform a *soft-shoe* song and dance that does nothing to further the narrative along. However, for Astaire these

solos are quintessentially a part of his film star persona, they present the audience with the expected solo that becomes part of the legacy of dance numbers that were printed on film. Significantly, 'I Wanna Be a Dancin' Man' presents the most elementary components of his dance number catalogue, free of any form of gimmick, such as the use of slow motion in *Easter Parade* and props as in *Royal Wedding*. This number presents Astaire as the central focus, his partner is the floor and the sand that he has scattered from his boater. With music by Harry Warren and lyrics by Johnny Mercer, it errs on the side of melancholy with lyrics that state:

> I wanna be a dancin' man while I can,
> Gonna leave my footsteps on the sands of time,
> If I never leave a dime.
>
> (Mercer, 1952)

The number is one of the rare occasions in which Astaire performs what was traditionally known as a 'sand dance', the only other instance of using sand was in *Top Hat* (1935), the latter to soften the sound of his taps in a hotel room. Tap historian Mark Knowles defines a 'sand dance' which is commonly known as a 'soft shoe' as a dance that was presented often without taps on the shoes using sand to 'create scraping, swishing and sliding sounds' (1998: 165). The song is written in the traditional 32-bar AABA format, three sections (A) that use the same melody and a bridge (B) in the middle which changes the melody, as a break before returning to the reoccurring melody, and in this case reemphasising the title of the song.

The curtains open to reveal Astaire in silhouette, against a dark blue back drop, and moving from side to side, scattering sand out of an up turned straw boater. As the lights come up, Astaire is revealed dressed in a white suit, bright blue shirt with blue neck tie, blue socks and two tone brogues. He lets out a euphoric "Yeah" and continues to scatter the sand around the stage. Framed in the centre of the screen, he tips his hat to empty the remnants of the sand, turns and the camera cuts to a close-up of Astaire singing the refrain of the song. He punctuates the offbeat rhythms of the bar, counts two and four, firstly by tapping the brim of his hat against his hand and then by brushing his toe on the floor as he crosses to the left of the stage. At this

point the camera pulls back to show a full-length Astaire in the frame. A quick *brush ball change* and back turn leads him to walk back to the centre of the stage. The camera tracks in to show the top half of Astaire again, as he sings to the audience, but never once looking directly into the camera. The boater is again in his hands, and with a quick flip and turn he places the hat on his head whilst singing the bridge of the song, arms out stretched to the audience. He starts to cross to the left of the stage with a jaunty bounce and gallop as the camera pulls back to a full frame shot. Another quick cross to the centre sees Astaire in a low *demi-plié* with the feet apart, arms outstretched with the palms down giving the illusion of wings about the 'free as a bird' lyric that he is singing. His next cross to stage left sees him progress the walk to a *chug,* once again hitting the offbeat of the rhythm of the melody by *chugging* the heel of the foot forward. He takes his boater in his hand and fans the hat, eventually directing it towards his right foot which mirrors the outward fan action as the camera pulls back. As he sings "rhythm", the orchestra goes into a *tacet* and Astaire claps his hands and launches into a tap break before turning back to the audience to finish the last few lines of the song. He completes a series of *brush ball changes* which move from side to side with both arms swinging across the body in the same direction.

The first part of the dance section has a very easy 4/4 tempo, continuing the steady rhythm of the song section and very typical of the 'soft shoe' style (Knowles, 1998: 193). Astaire uses a combination of single and double sounds in his footwork, primarily *flaps* and *shuffles* which are commonly attributed to soft shoe. A series of long slides and drags sees him travel back to the centre of the stage with a circular *rond de jambe* action of the leg, a motif that is repeated twice (see *figure 6.1*).

Figure 6.1: The outward circling of the leg motif that utilises the abrasive sound created by the foot in the sand

The simplicity of the footwork and sounds are further enhanced by the abrasive sound of the shoes on the sand which, particularly on the drags and slides, creates a more *legato* feel to the movement, which is contrasted by some of the crisper sounds of the tap steps utilised. Throughout this section, Astaire maintains a jaunty bounce within the knees as he travels, which develops contrast in the levels to utilise the scraping action on the sand and cushion the movement to keep it fluid and easy. The camera continues to keep the full body in frame, but adjusts the view to a higher level to capture Astaire's use of space. It also reveals the shape of Astaire's movement due to the swirls created in the sand covering the floor – punctuating the lyric of 'footsteps in the sands of time'.

After a brief *time-step*, the brass instruments highlight a blare in the instrumentation, which Astaire responds to with a high *assemble fermeé* type movement. As Astaire tosses his hat aside, the musical arrangement leads into a *stop-time* section, where there is only musical accompaniment on odd beats of the musical bar. Astaire fills the space in the accompaniment with some faster paced footwork based on double rhythms (&1) with the occasional triple rhythms (&a1) providing variety. He continues to play with the additional sound element of the sand using *stamps* and slides whilst using the unaccompanied space in the music to underline the syncopated rhythms of his feet. After this section, the silence is quickly broken by some punctuated stabs of the percussion instruments to which Astaire responds with childish glee running on the spot with a 'let go' attitude, abandoning the very debonair and controlled performance quality that had preceded this. A common attribute in any Astaire solo, this unexpected outburst lends well with his description of his 'outlaw' style as he breaks convention with this spontaneous eruption of energy which seems to have been building up.

The orchestration builds into full swing during the last section which Astaire cannot help but respond to in his performance with the odd shouts of 'yeah' and audible enjoyment of this interplay with the orchestra. His movement expands and is more energised as he travels upon the same trajectory of his motif. To end this phrase he uses the accented stabs in the orchestration to execute some staccato lunges which see him leap towards the floor, almost kneeling. He starts turning, which builds in energy with the drive of the musical accompaniment, to finish facing the camera in a close-up shot, hands out stretched to the audience singing the last section of the song, again never directly addressing the camera (see *figure 6.2*).

Figure 6.2: Always aware of the audience, Astaire never directly focuses his attention to the camera

As he travels towards the straw boater on the floor, on the word 'rhythm' he again emphasises the accents of the brass instruments, flips his boater with his foot and catches it in his hand (see *figure* 6.3). A series of quick *twist turns* and *tours*-like jumps with an inward circular action, build with the energy of the music, leading Astaire to the wings of the stage. He finishes with his right leg stretched diagonally downstage presenting his arm and boater to the foot beaming with joy at the completion of the number before quickly jumping into the wings out of sight from the audience.

Figure 6.3: With a quick kick of the foot, Astaire swiftly catches his boater in his hand and places it on his head

The 'Astaire' style is a term now coined to describe the look and feel of Astaire's body of movement in his film dances. A choreographer, working in the musical theatre genre of the 1930s, could simply instruct his dancers to be in the Astaire and Rogers genre and expect them to respond. However, this poses problems; within my own teaching I have noticed that students seldom grow up with these influences, and it is a rare student that spends time analysing the stylistic elements of a bygone performer. Later developments in the tap dance genre focus on the more percussive and musical elements of the dance form. The work of later 20th century tap dancers Gregory Hines, Savion Glover and Jason Samuels Smith have pushed the boundaries of tap dance as an art form beyond its inclusion in musical theatre, but the central focus is on the footwork and not the upper body.

Astaire referred to his style as 'a sort of outlaw style' realising that he would never become a ballet dancer, particularly considering his work in musical comedy dance, recognising 'that there should be no limitations' (1959: 325). Throughout his work, it is evident that there are certainly no restrictions on the possibilities of dance in musical films that Astaire explored. As a tap dancer Astaire differed from many other dancers of the period, his main focus was not only the feet, the upper body became an integrated part of the movement so that the arms, hands, torso and feet all spoke as one. Broadway choreographer Randy Skinner, who has a deep fondness for the Astaire style of movement states:

> He was the first that came along that paid attention to not only what was happening below the knees but the entire body. You can have a beautiful step going on but if something is going askew with the upper body, that focus can go. He was a master at bringing this together.
> (Skinner 2014)[66]

Astaire was very reticent to discuss his personal style, he did not spend time analysing it in great detail, simply stating: 'I just dance' (Astaire, 1959: 325). During the filming of the 1958 Paramount film *Funny Face*, film publicist Jack Hirshberg collated a file of press interviews

[66] *Len Goodman: For the Love of Fred Astaire* (2014), TV Documentary

undertaken by Astaire in which he commented 'the best style is really to have no style at all' (Astaire, 1958)[67]. Astaire made it clear that he could not describe himself as any one particular type of dancer and did not see the relevance of style in relation to dancing, he stated 'People talk too much about style. So [many] new dancers try to develop a manner of dancing distinctly their own – and sometimes they end up being typed [typecast]' (Astaire, 1958)[68]. Yet it is a performance mode that influenced a very specific style of tap dancing. The incorporation of balletic and ballroom-inspired movement into tap dance gave vernacular tap dance a sense of sophistication and elegance, very unlike the work of African American tap dancers of the early 1900s[69] and certainly in contrast to the heavy, flat footed style of early film dancer Ruby Keeler, whose styles concentrated on the footwork rather than engaging the upper body. What does stand out, particularly in his duets with Rogers, Vera-Ellen and Hayworth[70], is the integration of tap and ballroom styles to create a unified form of tap dance. Tap dance duets in musical films more often featured two dancers of the same gender, so the romantic suggestion was not the driving force for the dance. One such example is the case of Donald O'Connor and Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*, which alternatively present a competitive showcase of tap virtuosity as in the case of the African-American duo The Nicholas Brothers. Astaire used the device of tap and other styles of dance to emphasise the romantic elements of the narrative, and in 1958 stated:

> I use dance to tell a story… Every dance helps to progress the plot or explain a story point in the film. So the sensible thing is to do away with limitations and self-imposed restrictions – just dance.
>
> (Astaire, 1958)[71]

As a result, the relationship between Astaire and his partners was of a much closer proximity, often resulting in the ballroom hold; dancing face to face, the woman's arms placed upon the

[67] Jack Hirshberg Papers 1953-1980, Margaret Herrick Library
[68] Jack Hirshberg Papers 1953-1980, Margaret Herrick Library
[69] See Stearns & Stearns (1994: 186-187) who credit Bill Robinson with changing the African American aesthetic of tap dance by being lighter and more upright in his style.
[70] I do not include Cyd Charisse in this example, simply because she was not a tap dancer and did not ever tap with Astaire in the films that they made together.
[71] Jack Hirshberg Papers 1953-1980, Margaret Herrick Library

shoulder and upper arm of her male partner, with Astaire clearly dictating the lead of the movement. Chase, who was introduced to Astaire as a chorus dancer at MGM before being his last on-screen partner for a series of television specials in the 1950s and 1960s, was very aware of the importance of this relationship that unfolded during a dance for Astaire. Chase states:

> Fred always looked at his partner and they looked back, there was always a relationship…the whole thing was about two people having an experience that happened to be dancing. When you needed that support, or that arm that needed to be there, it was always exactly where it needed to be. He whisked you in such a way that you were just transported you didn't feel the mechanics of it…
>
> (Chase, 2014)[72]

It was a common reoccurrence in Astaire duets to replace a dance partner with a prop. The film *Royal Wedding* showcases two such innovations: 'You're All the World to Me' sees Astaire dance on the walls and ceilings of his apartment whilst 'Sunday Jumps' showcases his ability to transform a coat stand from an inanimate object into a whirling "dervish" of excitement that *pirouettes* on his every command. Whether human or not, Astaire directs the same attention and focus to his companion as highlighted by Chase. *Figure 6.4* below illustrates Astaire as he prepares to cradle the coat rack in his arms directing complete attention as if unaware that the prop is unable to physically respond without his prompting.

[72] *Len Goodman: For the Love of Fred Astaire* (2014), TV Documentary

Figure 6.4: Astaire in Royal Wedding using a coat stand as a partner

Astaire also became very aware of the advantages and disadvantages of capturing dance movement through the camera. His collaboration at RKO with assistant, and later frequent choreographer of Astaire films, Pan, became a training ground for the pair in capturing dance successfully on film. In describing how they worked out their numbers, Pan stated:

> We'd rehearse in front of those big mirrors, and those were our cameras. If you travel across the screen you get a much better effect of movement than if you come straight down the middle because you don't see that motion. All you get is a figure getting larger. We designated things so that if you had a step that came from the back and you wanted to coming forward [*sic.*], instead of coming straight down we'd do it diagonally. Then you had motion and speed.
>
> (Pan in Kobal, 1988: 128)

In a 1976 interview, when Astaire was questioned by Ronald L. Davis on his involvement with camera work, in his typically evasive way, Astaire did not enter into any technical description but rather offered:

> You automatically know what you want to do. You get more action if your camera stays still and pans across something than if you go right with it… high shots are effective but you only use those things when you think they should be used.
>
> (Astaire in Davis, 1976: 19)[73]

[73] Ronald L. Davis Oral History Collection, Margaret Herrick Library

Astaire states in the interview that an awareness of the camera and performing to it is something that he strived never to rely on in his filmed dances. With a career established in live theatrical performances, Astaire was experienced in dancing for audience approval, applause would signify confirmation of a successful delivery, something that film does not offer in the recording process. On performing in a different medium Astaire stated:

> Many people told me, "oh, you will miss the audiences' reaction. You'll miss the applause". It was not so. I did not miss any of those things. My numbers were built for applause reaction and as I found out later when the numbers were right, they would get applause in the movie theaters.
> (1960: 51)[74]

Mueller observed that only in the 1950 Paramount film *Let's Dance,* with comedienne and singer Betty Hutton, does Astaire knowingly look directly into the camera whilst dancing (Mueller, 1985: 30).

Film historian Patricia Tobias (2014)[75] has studied Astaire's use of the camera and observed that the lack of direct focus to the camera is very clear from his first appearance in MGM's *Dancing Lady* (1933). In his duet with Crawford, Astaire dances out of the frame and illuminates his lack of understanding with the camera. Astaire commented:

> Knowing absolutely nothing about photographing a dance for the screen, I did a great deal of listening and studying. I was pleased with lots of things but kept thinking of what I would like to try if I ever got in a position to make my own decision.
> (1960: 49)[76]

It is clear from Astaire's comments above that he acquired a deeper knowledge of how film captures dance, which becomes very evident during his contract at RKO where, alongside Pan, Astaire experimented with this process. According to Tobias, Astaire created what became known as the 'Astaire Dolly' which, with a series of elevators, allowed the camera to follow him.

[74] Fred Astaire Manuscript Collection, University of Southern California
[75] *Len Goodman: For the Love of Fred Astaire* (2014), TV Documentary
[76] Fred Astaire Manuscript Collection, University of Southern California

The dolly is described by film director H. C. Potter as being 'on tiny wheels with a mount for the camera that put the lens about two feet above' (Potter in Croce, 1972: 127) and would enable the cameraman to capture the movement without any sudden movement in the camera. Tobias observes that 'he's [Astaire] always in the centre third of the frame, always. And the camera just keeps him there. If he dances this way [signals forward] the camera pulls back. It was very fluid' (Tobias, 2014)[77]. Despite the technical prowess and behind-the-scenes processes of the studios production staff, simplicity is key to the filming of Astaire's dances. In most of his films you see Astaire, either solo or partnered, in a full screen shot. Whilst the editing of shots is apparent, Astaire's numbers are not overly-complicated and for much of the dances there are only two or three changes in the filming angles of the camera. This became a standard for dance in musical films and is also evident in the work of Kelly. As dancers and choreographers, Astaire and Kelly became pioneers in the technique of capturing dance on film, something that has not lasted in the shifting trends of 21st century cinema.

The antithesis of this is in film director Baz Luhrmann's production *Moulin Rouge* (2001), the camera is more active than the dancers on screen and as result one is never fully able to appreciate the choreography and performances. In her study of the representation of the Can-Can on screen, dance scholar Clare Parfitt suggests that Lurhmann's intention here was to capture moments of 'audience participatory cinema' to challenge audiences to enter the 'cinema of attractions' (Parfitt, 2008: 326-327) that transports the audience to the surreal world of the Moulin Rouge, rather than capture the action of a dance number as it evolves. In comparison to the working methods of Astaire and Kelly to utilise the advantages of advanced technology to capture dance on film, Luhrman's attempts in *Moulin Rouge*, at least for the dance purist, provide a disjointed sequence of dance moments that do not allow for the choreography to be fully appreciated. The dance, as thrilling as it can be, is never shown in its entirety, much of the dance

[77] *Len Goodman: For the Love of Fred Astaire* (2014), TV Documentary

sequences are interjected with additional scenes that take the viewer away from the dance action.

During Astaire's 25-year film career he worked with many of the major dance directors employed by the various studios he was contracted with. At MGM Alton, Loring and Pan were the choreographers most frequently assigned to his pictures. Musical films are all about collaboration: directors, choreographers, producers, actors, composer and lyricists, scriptwriters, musical arrangers and costume designers all have some 'authorial' voice in the creative process. It is this very nature of collaboration that adds difficulties to the auteur debate. However, unlike many of the film stars of the period, Astaire, as both performer and choreographer, left a legacy of dance numbers that demonstrate a consistent quality, both in movement and construction. In terms of his own personal style, the only time that there is some variance of this in films, such as *The Band Wagon*, is where Kidd took direct responsibility for the choreography (see chapter 5 for a discussion on the process). By and large, dance directors on Astaire films concerned themselves with ensemble numbers, whilst Astaire worked on his solos. Although Astaire was certainly not afraid to be forthcoming about the assistance that he gained from choreographers, stating:

> …I was creative to a large degree. I don't say I created everything I ever did, because I always like the help of anybody who had any ideas…
>
> (Astaire cited in Mueller, 1985: 14)

Alex Romero, an MGM dance assistant, who later went on to choreograph for several musicals, assisted Astaire on a number of his MGM pictures stating that 'he [Astaire] does most of it and I learn it and I'm learning the girl's part' (Romero in Knowles, 2013: 55). The role of the assistant was often to stand in for the partner and retain the choreography between rehearsals and the eventual shooting of the number, which could be some weeks apart. Romero fondly remembers that Astaire was one of the few dance stars on film who gave him credit for his assistance, and as in the case of 'I Wanna Be a Dancin' Man' from *The Belle of New York* Astaire informed the

film's producer, Freed, that Romero had contributed some dance steps to Astaire's solo (Romero in Knowles, 2013: 77).

Albeit recognised as primarily a tap dancer, Astaire's vocabulary of steps is certainly limited, especially in comparison to those of Powell and Miller. However, his dances do not have the feel of repetition that sees the same combinations of steps presented in a different order, as in Powell's routines. Astaire's tap technique does not generally demonstrate the same articulation or intricacy in its execution, a rare occasion of this is in is his duets with Powell in *Broadway Melody of 1940*. His vocabulary often utilises many stamps of the whole foot, *heel scuffs* and two and three beat *shuffles*. Astaire also utilises elements of the ballet vocabulary with low *attitude* turns, *cabrioles* and *jetés*. What is significant in making Astaire the consummate artist was the ability to use this small vocabulary in innovative approaches from number to number, creating dances that seemed inventive and were always unique to the particular film at the time.

Music, an element that is discussed as inspiration behind the development of such memorable dance routines on film, is credited, at least by music scholar Todd Decker, as being the 'fundamental creative impulse' (2011: 7) for Astaire's work. Decker's book *Music Makes Me: Fred Astaire and Jazz*, explores the musicianship of Astaire and his unique place in working alongside composers Berlin and the Gershwins, to name a few, in engaging with the American songbook throughout his illustrious career. Rhythm becomes one of Astaire's key variances in his performances, particularly in his use of broken rhythms and syncopation, or going 'off' the beat, that is heavily featured in his work. Decker observes:

> Astaire's use of breaks – a lifelong practice deployed to varied ends – serves as but one indication that he thinks in jazz terms.
>
> (2011: 3)

A break, in a tap dance terms, signals a change in the rhythmic pattern. In a traditional *time-step* sequence, the rhythm repeats for six bars, and the last two bars present a different rhythm

that emphasises the end of the musical phrase. Astaire's rhythmic patterns very rarely followed this format of repetition; 'Begin the Beguine', a duet with Powell from *Broadway Melody of 1940*, is a rare example of repeating rhythms over a six-bar phrase with a break during the last two bars.

Musician and authority on the music of the Gershwins, Michael Feinstein feels that what made Astaire so revolutionary was his interest in contemporary music of the time. A chance meeting with George Gershwin in the 1920s led to a collaboration in musical theatre that saw two of the twentieth century's most accomplished artists work together to define a unique integration between music and dance, a similar relationship he had with Berlin during his RKO film series. Feinstein states that upon hearing a new song 'Fred would find out with his feet if he could do something with the song and they [Gershwin or Berlin] would develop it. It was revolutionary' (Feinstein 2014).[78]

Whilst certainly a product of the studio system, Astaire was never the property of any studio that he worked for, once his star status had been achieved. Heavily involved in the creative process of his pictures, it is Astaire who created the *Astaire* style that has become so identifiable and recognisable long after his eventual retirement from dancing in 1970 and later, following his death. Without Astaire the dancer, there was no Astaire the film star. Following a highly successful career in vaudeville and musical theatre, both in New York and London, Astaire was already established as a star. His film career came at a time, when he was 33 years old, when most dancers would consider retirement, yet provided a filmic record that continues to be appraised in the twenty-first century. It is a legacy that is also fiercely protected, gaining rare artistic control over his work, the Astaire image is under constant scrutiny from his widow. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* from 1994 highlighted the difficulties that Turner Entertainment

[78] *Len Goodman: For the Love of Fred Astaire* (2014), TV Documentary

and the Kennedy Center in Washington had in obtaining the rights to use clips of Astaire dancing in a film compilation and honorary celebration of his film partner, Ginger Rogers (Brennan, 1994). Few film stars are able to exercise such control over their image from the grave.

Throughout the studio system Astaire, ultimately, always remained Astaire. His dance style was incomparable to other stars of the period, even those that danced, and resulted in a career that spanned 25 years on screen. Whilst Astaire did not write the screenplays, or even direct his pictures, the projected image is quintessential to the stylistic qualities so embedded into his movement vocabulary. Astaire's canon of films provide a body of work that demonstrates complete control over the performance quality and projection of Astaire's image, whatever character being portrayed, does not vary. The sophistication, elegance in movement, ballroom-influenced choreography give a rich tapestry of dance on screen that is quintessential to the 'outlaw' style that Astaire refers to. In arguing the validity of the Astaire-Rogers dance films, Croce suggested that 'dancing was transformed into a vehicle of serious emotion between a man and a woman (1972: 8). She compares these films with those of Kelly, the only other male dancer to reach the same status as Astaire. Croce observes that the main difference between Astaire and Kelly are levels of sophistication in terms of their filmic output. When Astaire dances in film he has his own independent existence, whereas when Kelly dances the dance itself becomes 'plebeian' in its attempt to integrate with the overall narrative (Croce, 1972: 7). Whilst there certainly are very clear examples of differing levels of sophistication between the two dancers, Kelly inhabited a very different quality of character and approach to dance as is discussed in the following section.

6.4 Gene Kelly

Gene Kelly (1912-1996) is a name synonymous with the development of dance in the film musical, not only a film star, but also recognised as a choreographer, director and collaborator

on some of the most memorable and artistic MGM musicals from the Freed Unit. An athletic man of Irish decent, Kelly's integration of tap, folk, modern and classical dance styles helped shape the development of musical theatre jazz dance in film. Kelly epitomised integrating dance into the narrative of the plot, not only through story-telling, but as a means of expressing the emotional state of the particular character he was playing - from the euphoric declaration of being in love in *Singin in the Rain*, the introspection of romantic complications in *Summer Stock* or the fantasy of storytelling for children in *Anchors Aweigh*. Kelly stated that his dances 'were about the feeling of elation' (1975: 230)[79] and he strove to develop a pure 'American' style of dance that interwove all aspects of tap dance, classical and modern styles, folk dance and sportsmanship. Articulate and educated about dance, Kelly spoke at great length in the years after the MGM musicals about dance on film. He had great respect for classical and modern dancers but felt when they danced it 'had nothing to do with what an American looked like; how he moved, how he dressed' (1975: 18-19)[80] which is why his style developed both in terms of the movement vocabulary he employed, and the more casual attire he adorned. Yet, as acknowledged by history scholar Julia L. Foulkes, costumes for modern dancers had already broken the tradition of the ballet tutu and musical theatre costumes which emphasised the movement of specific body parts, unlike the modern dance costumes, consisting of floor length dresses, 'directed the audiences' gazes to the movements of the whole body emanating from the torso' (Foulkes, 2002: 45-46). Admittedly, Foulkes' discussion on costuming centres around the female body, whereas Kelly was referring to the male form. Kelly's statement seems at odds with wider discourses on sociology and dance, particularly in the work of dance scholar Helen Thomas (1995: 130) who considers that the work of Martha Graham and Ballet Caravan[81], amongst others as not being nationalistic but rather aiming to communicate 'the rhythms of

[79] Gene Kelly Interview, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, New York
[80] Gene Kelly Interview, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, New York
[81] Ballet Caravan was founded in 1936 by Lincoln Kirstein and focused on the creation of dance works influenced by American history and culture, prominent choreographers and performers included Eugene Loring, Agnes de Mille and Michael Kidd. The company would later merge to become the New York City Ballet.

American life' (1995: 131). It highlights the wider divide in the status of dance, both jazz and tap dance are considered American forms of dance, but studies of the breadth of dance disciplines seem to confine the socio-historic focus to the single genre.

It is possible that Kelly did not wholly identify with the portrayal of American life as portrayed in modern dance works as speaking to the nation, particularly in light of the specific area of the industry in which he was employed. Foulkes considers that post-World War II 'modern dancers shed their efforts to appeal to a mainstream audience' (2002:5), which is at odds with Kelly who, bound by contract to a film studio, was no doubt aware of the financial demands imposed on creating film musicals that resulted in profits upon general release. Two significant films *The Pirate* and *Invitation to the Dance* (1956) emphasise this point, as they are considered 'art' films that were too high-brow for film audiences at the time. Both films have been given wider appreciation in later years than compared to their initial premieres because they did not strive to concede to the mainstream popularity that films of this period so often did. (Fordin, 1984: 396 and Hess and Dabholkar, 2014: xi-xvii).

Choreographer Twyla Tharp, in paying tribute to Kelly upon his death, stated 'it was his instinct that dance is work that allowed him to cheerfully locate frivolous movement in real places' (Tharp, 1996). During much of his career Kelly's on-screen characters in musical films often portrayed servicemen: sailors in the films *Anchors Aweigh, On the Town* and *Invitation to the Dance*; and soldiers (or at least ex-soldiers) in *Thousands Cheer, An American in Paris* and *It's Always Fair Weather*. Genné observes that the sailor's uniform is favoured as suitable attire for the dancer and the recognition in cultural status 'made him [the sailor] the ideal musical hero' (Genné, 2001:90). Genné continues to acknowledge the patriotic significance of sailors that dance as a representation of the all-American hero 'whose casual manner and relaxed, down-home demeanour mark him as the boy next door' (2001:94) and so make an appealing character choice. Whilst there are certainly many instances of servicemen being portrayed on

film, particularly during World War II, Kelly epitomised the heroic qualities in a manner that spoke to audiences through his dances. Fully aware of the importance of public support in becoming established as a film star, Kelly stated:

> There are better dancers than Astaire or myself, and certainly better actors and singers but the public won't have them. The trouble with movies is that no matter how talented a person is, he will flop unless the public takes to his personality.
>
> (Kelly cited in Thomas, 1974:10)

When questioned about the differences between himself and Astaire (whom he had great respect for) Kelly responded:

> Fred's success I believe, was his elegance, his particular style, which was unique no one can really dance like him… I wanted to dance like Marlon Brando wanted to act [rolls up his sleeves and looks brawny at the camera]… Fred represents the aristocracy when he dances and I represent the proletarian.
>
> (Kelly, 2013)[82]

It is perhaps for this reason that two male dancers became such significant and influential film stars in Hollywood musicals: they projected two very different motives in their performances. Astaire rose to fame during to the early 1930s at a time when movie audiences sought escapism due to the Great Depression (Grant, 2012: 72) ; Kelly's success came post Second World War and he offered an alternative form of escapism: the ordinary man who could brighten a mundane day with a tap dance on the street. Kelly danced with children, entertained crowds on the streets, incorporated props, danced with his "buddies", and shared more intimate moments in duets with a female partner. His dance routines develop out of a natural situation and, as Delamater observes:

> [They] not only epitomize the characters within the context of the films but also incorporate a dancing style which is both eclectic and unique, which is constantly inventive and resourceful, and which demonstrates Kelly's strong feelings about the necessity of integrating dance and film.
>
> (Delamater, 1981: 133)

[82] *Talking Pictures*, 2013, BBC TV Documentary

Much attention is drawn to Kelly's masculinity and virility as a dancer, film scholar Steve Cohan, who examines Kelly in terms of male spectatorship, states that the image manufactured during his time at MGM presents Kelly, 'whose dancing "with balls" exceeded heterosexual regulation yet without ceasing to appear manly' (Cohan, 2005: 151). Astaire, in contrast, represented the elite and upper class in his early years at RKO, Kelly offered another possibility. Both, however, presented a portrayal of male dancers that would not cast doubt over their sexual identities. Cohan acknowledges that in terms of spectatorship in the film musical, the 'male stars offered an alternative representation of masculinity' (1993:91) for a raft of film stars, such as Bing Crosby and Donald O'Connor, who would not have been considered 'pin-ups' otherwise. As far as the integration of dream ballets in Kelly's films is concerned, his biographer Clive Hirschhorn observed:

> …instead of alienating his male audiences, which he feared he might do, he made them identify with him and won them over by the virility of his dancing. There was nothing sissy or effeminate about him, and they relaxed completely in his presence.
>
> (1974: 184)

Kelly was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and raised in a working-class family of Irish descent. Encouraged into the arts by their mother, all of the Kelly children took dance classes and played musical instruments. In complete contrast to the early career of Astaire, much of the Kelly family's performance took part in amateur contests. It was not until the early 1930s, when Kelly was studying law, that he performed professionally in an act with his brother, Fred. Eventually the family established a dance school in 1931and throughout the 1930s Kelly was able to establish himself as both a teacher and choreographer (Hirshhorn, 1974: 24-49). In 1932 Kelly became a member of the Chicago Dance Masters Association and he undertook masterclasses specialising in folk and ethnic dances, particularly Russian and Polish, as taught during this period (1975: 25)[83]. These formative years proved an important learning curve for the aspiring dancer, a new found interest in classical ballet saw Kelly audition for David Lichine, a principal

[83] Gene Kelly Interview, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, New York

dancer with the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo and be offered a role in the male ensemble (Hirshhorn, 1974: 60). Nevertheless, the dance influences Kelly was introduced to during his early life were utilised within his later choreography during his creative output at MGM. Having choreographed for local productions in Pittsburgh, Kelly made the eventual move to New York in the hope of becoming a choreographer in 1938. It was an audition for choreographer Robert Alton that secured Kelly a role in the male chorus of the Cole Porter revue *Leave it To Me* (1938), which led to further performing work in another Alton revue *One for the Money* (1939).

The hope of becoming a choreographer was still in sight and Kelly spent the summer with a repertory company in Connecticut which allowed the opportunity to be cast as the lead role in the Williams Saroyan play *The Time of Your Life* which opened in 1939 (Thomas, 1974: 16-17). Cast in the role of Harry the Hoofer, it provided Kelly with the springboard to develop his choreographic voice. On developing the role, Kelly stated:

> …there was no character – whether a sailor or a truck driver or a gangster – that couldn't be interpreted through dancing, if one found the correct choreographic language.
>
> (Kelly in Hirshhorn, 1974: 84)

The freedom given to develop a role through dance proved to be a significant factor in Kelly's choreographic approach to creating a character which was further developed in another Alton musical, the 1940 Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart production *Pal Joey*. It proved a pivotal moment in Kelly's career, not only gaining him recognition as a dancing male lead on Broadway, but also bringing him to the attention of film producers. Although choreographed by Alton, Kelly has stated that he was given freedom to develop his own style of dance (Hirshhorn, 1974: 98) and has credited Alton with advancing the ensemble dancing from military precision kick lines to chorus numbers that stayed relevant to the narrative (Kelly, 1975: 31)[84]. On creating the character of Joey, Kelly stated:

[84] Gene Kelly Interview, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, New York

> …it gave me a chance use my own style of dancing to create a character. I wanted to dance to American music and at that time nobody else was doing it, and Joey was a meaty character to play. He was completely amoral. After some scenes I could feel the waves of hate coming from the audience. Then I'd smile at them and dance it would relax them. It was interesting to be able to use the character to manipulate the audience.
>
> (Kelly cited in Thomas, 1974: 18)

Kelly certainly was not the first to dance to American music, Astaire had been influenced by the music of Berlin and Gershwin since the 1920s. However, it is permissible to consider that Kelly was the first to incorporate his 'style' of dance in musical theatre. In a 1975 interview, Kelly acknowledged that Cole had been dancing to popular records and jazz music, yet infused it with his interest in East Indian dance styles (1975: 28)[85]. In terms of his style, Kelly has acknowledged that he was heavily influenced by ballet and modern dance (Kelly, 1975: 28)[86], particularly in the work of Graham and Weidman (Kelly cited in Stevens Jnr., 2006: 525-530), and the integration of tap dance.

Whilst the 1930s and 1940s saw some of the biggest developments in modern and jazz dance, the popularity of tap dancing was at its peak, and significantly Kelly was one of the pioneers who incorporated all of these elements into his own particular style. Like Powell, with her balletic and acrobatic influences, and Astaire, with the sophistication of ballroom dances, Kelly merged the disciplines to create an identity as a dancer. Where Astaire was slender in frame, Kelly was of a similar height but stockier in build. Where Astaire lifted the body, Kelly used depth in the use of *plié* through the knees to give a more grounded quality to the movement. The balletic influences are shown through the shape of the movement, particularly with the use of the *attitude* line when turning, the use of *grand jetés* to travel through the space and the incorporation of the *port de bras* through the arms, particularly when elevated. The modern and jazz influences are demonstrated through the floor-work and depth of the movement alongside

[85] Gene Kelly Interview, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, New York
[86] Gene Kelly Interview, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, New York

a stronger and more held use of the torso. An understanding of the two distinct styles is fundamental to Astaire and Kelly's consideration as auteurs through their use of dance exhibiting a personal expression of their individual performance styles, and in the integration of dance to develop not the only narrative, but the stylistic elements of the overall film production. In particular, Kelly did not resign himself to one language in movement, but rather incorporated and developed a range of differing techniques to create his own, unique, quality of movement. Of particular interest is the later developments of Kelly's choreographic work, particularly in comparison to those of Astaire. In later films, such as *Brigadoon* and *Les Girls* there is a distinct lack of tap dance in Kelly's vocabulary, greater emphasis is now placed on the balletic and jazz dance influences that were slowly becoming more influential in both Hollywood and Broadway musicals. Astaire, in contrast, utilised an amalgamation of both ballroom and tap dance styles in his early films at RKO. Though still evident in his later work in the 1940s and 1950s at MGM, the ballroom element is not as recognisable, with a greater reliance on trickery of the camera and inanimate objects as dance partners. Unlike Kelly, tap very much remains part of his performance style, unless when dancing with Charisse, such as in *Silk Stockings* where there is no Astaire tap solo present within the narrative.

Figure 6.5 illustrates one of the more typical Kelly poses that re-occur in his movement style:

Figure 6.5: Kelly shown in the 'Broadway Rhythm' number from Singin' in the Rain

The use of *plié* here has a distinct relationship with jazz dance, where the central force of gravity pushes the movement downwards and into the ground, providing power through the legs for high elevations and the ability to travel across the floor. Dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild links these to the Africanist presence that pervades the roots of jazz dance. She suggests the depth in the movement shifts the dancer's centre and allows for greater changes in the rhythmic quality of the movements (1996: 14). The frame of the upper torso shows strength in its placement and hold, whilst the arms expel an energy and presence that not only compliment the shape of the movement but associate with the overall aesthetic – similar to the use of *port de bras* in classical ballet. The arm positions of jazz[87] dance are based on the classical positions,

[87] Jazz dance as a term is rather a generalisation, as with the evolution of jazz music, the genre has splintered into many different branches and/or styles. For the most part, jazz in the musical films discussed in this study refers to the theatrical jazz dance style discussed in Chapter 5. For a greater discussion on the range of different branches contained in the jazz dance family see the discussion of dance scholars Lindsay Guarino and Wendy Oliver (2014) who provide one of the most comprehensive and up to date analysis of this dance genre.

but show more length and breadth, something which Kelly demonstrates throughout his dance work. His arms are incorporated into the movement of the entire body and provide not only support, particularly in his *barrel turns* where the body and legs execute a 360 degree turn in the air whilst the upper body gives the illusion of suspending in the air, but also enable the body to move naturally toward the direction of the foot and leg work.

In terms of tap vocabulary Kelly, like Powell, Astaire and later Miller, demonstrated a reliance on repetition of certain steps, particularly the *Maxi-Ford*, which travels sideways away from the centre of the body before coming back and quickly changing the direction to the other side. Unlike Astaire's footwork which is often bigger in its execution in terms of full movement from the hip, knee and ankle joints, Kelly's footwork is often small and close to the ground, unless combined with elevated or travelling movements. Consistent with his claims to present an all-American form of dance, he also relied on traditional steps from the tap vocabulary such as the *Shim-Sham* and the traditional *time-steps*. In reviewing Kelly's musicianship, dance critic Brian Seibert paints an unflattering picture stating 'his rhythms were utterly predictable, with an Irish lilt and triplet feel. In the age of swing, he seldom swung' (Seibert, 2015: 288), continuing to comment that whilst Astaire's legacy is entwined with the American songbook and jazz music, 'Kelly wasn't a jazz artist and Astaire was' (Seibert, 2015: 288). This is an unfair assessment, as Kelly has never referred to himself as a jazz musician, his only reference was to dancing to American music which has included the music of Leonard Bernstein in O*n the Town* , George and Ira Gershwin in *An American in Paris* and the song catalogue of MGM producer Freed and Brown cited in *Singin' in the Rain*. Other than Gershwin's work, none of these examples have ever alluded to be considered 'pure' jazz music, but are associated with the wider catalogue of American popular song – although in the case of O*n the Town* much of the Broadway score was discarded and only a few Bernstein compositions remained. It is an imbalanced assessment to link Kelly with jazz music and rhythms, throughout his musical film career the scores in his films were written by composers of popular music, where rhythms rarely stray from the conformity of

straight 4/4 or 3/4 time signatures with a standard 32-bar structure or he danced to music that, if not traditional, certainly paid homage to classical influences.

Kelly's rhythms conformed very closely to the double (&1) and triple (&a1) note values with syncopated (the 'off beat') rhythms used sparingly. Surprisingly evident is the lightness in tone of Kelly's footwork. Where both Powell and Astaire used variances in the pitch (tap dancers use the term light and shade) created by the amount of weight behind a movement and placement of the foot on the floor to generate a contrast between heavier and lighter sounds, Kelly most often maintained a crisp lightness in the footwork. In addition, Kelly's dance movements travelled across the soundstage and demonstrated an expansive use of the space. This is not to say that tap dancers do not travel, but a necessity to the style of dance is to keep in contact with the floor in order to strike the required sounds. When Astaire and Powell turn and travel, they may make single sounds of the foot making contact with the floor, but it is a rare occurrence for there to be additional sounds achieved due to the speed of the movement and also the required articulation of the ankle and knee joints. Kelly's blend of jazz, ballet and modern vocabularies gave a greater sense of elevation and drive that navigated his movement across a wider circumference. When Kelly tapped with more intricate rhythms the expanse of his movement decreased in order to facilitate the number of sounds that the steps require, this then dissipates when Kelly contrasts the more contained tap sequences with the dynamic shift to airborne or far reaching movement. The understanding of Kelly's style, particularly in comparison to other dancers discussed is also inherent to his authorship of the dances created on-screen. With such a high degree of collaboration involved in the musical film process, the ability to observe Kelly's stylistic and technical ability provides greater insight into ascertaining his contribution, and quintessential authorial voice on the material presented.

The term 'athleticism'[88] is the most common generic description of the Kelly style in obituaries of his death in 1996, yet does not fully consider what makes this style athletic. Delamater observed that whilst Kelly employed tap dancing it 'seldom predominated in his style', continuing to note that 'Kelly's movements tended to be broader and to seem more muscular' (1981: 158). Whilst balletic influences are embedded, the athleticism is showcased through two significant devices in the Kelly mode; through the movement vocabulary and the physical setting of the dance numbers on the soundstage. Kelly demonstrates daring stunts that incorporate gravity defying dance passages such as the pendulum like movements atop of a large ladder in *Living in a Big Way* (1947) and the swashbuckling and tightrope walking in *The Pirate*. In the movement vocabulary, beyond the use of *grand allegro* steps, Kelly displays a reliance on specific movements that are utilised from film to film. *Over the tops* are shown for example in *Anchors Aweigh* and *Deep in My Heart* in which Kelly, already elevated off the floor, extends one leg and proceeds to jump over the extended leg whilst seemingly suspending in the air. Similarly, Russian folk dance influences are displayed in *Anchors Aweigh* and *Singin' in the Rain* with the use of a low *plié*, almost kneeling position, where the legs either extend forwards one by one or produce a circular *ronds de jambe en dedans* action whilst travelling forward to the camera.

Two numbers in *For Me and My Gal* and *DuBarry Was a Lady (1943)* illustrate his vaudevillian background; Kelly executes a series of travelling press-up movements that transverse the entire width of the stage. The number that quintessentially encapsulates all of Kelly's athletic prowess is 'Be a Clown' from *The Pirate* alongside the African-American acrobatic dance team The Nicholas Brothers. It is significant in part because it broke traditions bound by racial tensions of the 1940s in allowing black and white performers to dance together, an injustice that Kelly did not support[89] (Hess and Dabholkar, 2014: 85-86), and challenged the studio head Louis B.

[88] See Maura Keefe (2009) for a detailed discussion on the links between athletes and dancers. Keefe traces back the association of male dancers and sportsmen from a dance perspective.

[89] Whilst this study is not focused on the racial inequality of the studio system, it is not coincidental that the Nicholas Brothers are presented as clowns. Biographer and dance scholar Constance Valis-Hill, in her study of the Nicholas

Mayer to maintain in its inclusion in the film (Brideson & Brideson, 2017: 190). There is also irony present in this particular number due to the racial differences between the performers, Gottschild acknowledges that Hollywood, and America, often disregarded tap dancing's roots in African-American culture due to the fact that film dancers such as Astaire and Kelly, through the projection of their talents and image on screen, claimed tap dance as their own form of dance (2000: 84). Similarly, film scholar Carol J. Clover (1995), argues for the appropriateness of plagiarism in the film *Singin' in the Rain,* due to its heavy reliance on a movement vocabulary previously utilised by African-American performers such as the Nicholas Brothers. Clover's particular reference here is O'Connor's star turn in the song 'Make 'Em Laugh', whose acrobatic somersaults of the studio walls mimic the choreography of the Nicholas Brothers (1995: 728). Whilst Clover's argument is not to accuse, as she terms, 'theft' in itself, it does give recognition to the many black dancers whose voices were lost in the studio system. Tap dance, particularly in Vaudeville, evolved by borrowing and developing the steps of other artists. Dance historians Jean and Marshall Stearns address the problematic issue of copyright in terms of dancers' material quoting African- American tap dancer Eddie Rector as stating 'if you could copyright a step, nobody could lift a foot' (Stearns and Stearns, 1994: 338).

In *The Pirate,* Kelly and the Nicholas Brothers are cast as three clown characters who cavort and offer playful exchanges of exuberant energy in their on-screen performance. Whilst its acrobatic content is certainly a toned-down version of the Nicholas Brothers other work on screen, their influence is evident in the nature of the choreographic content. Several motifs mentioned above are utilised alongside a series of air borne cartwheels, Russian influenced knee work and a series of travelling press ups. Whilst none of these movements were new to the Kelly vocabulary, they brought a light-hearted and energetic escape to the end of the film.

Brothers (2002: 229-231) acknowledges that the brothers were happy with the result, Kelly, whilst presenting the duo in a mainstream MGM film as his dance partners, is always the central character in the dance.

It would also be one of the last numbers in which Kelly would display such daring athletic movement as his growing use of other dance forms became so indigenous to his style.

Comparable to Astaire, with such a wealth of equivalent material from which to choose, selecting single examples of Kelly's work to analyse is not an easy task. However, the following analysis considers one of Kelly's earliest choreographic efforts from *Anchors Aweigh,* a solo that provides elements of later motifs that are developed in further films. The number is set to the Argentinian Tango 'Le Cumparsita', a popular Tango written in 1916. Kelly's character, who is a sailor on shore leave, imitates a Spanish Matador in a dream sequence in which he vies for the attention of actress Kathryn Grayson. Throughout the film, Kelly's character has been suppressing his romantic feelings for Grayson whilst trying to get her character an audition at MGM studios (MGM was clearly not against nepotism). Set on a soundstage at the studio, the dance presents itself as a dream sequence in order for the characters to reveal their true feelings. Kelly establishes the scene by describing Grayson's character as a Princess and himself as a bandit chief 'who had the seen the princess once and could never forget her. The one night he'd risk his life to see her again.' (Sidney, 1945 [Film]). The set consists of a Spanish themed palatial villa with a balcony on the left hand side of the screen, a bridge towards the rear which links to a staircase and parapets with square cut turrets. Under the bridge is a pool of water and downstage is a large stone structure which houses a tree. The floor of the set is a rich dark red. Kelly, as the bandit, appears from the back of the pool and hides in the shadows on seeing Grayson, as the Princess, entering onto the balcony. The bandit is dressed in tight fitting black trousers, a vibrant yellow fitted shirt, covered with a black cape, a *sombrero cordobés* and a black domino mask across the eyes to hide his identity, whilst holding a rapier. There is more than a passing resemblance to the character of Zorro who appeared in the 1940 film *The Mark of Zorro*.

Kelly reveals himself to the Princess by removing his hat, and she acknowledges his entrance by walking closer to the balcony railings. The bandit steps off the surround of the pool to bring himself closer and removes his eye covering whilst throwing a red rose to the Princess. The strings in the orchestration intensify to reveal the start of the composition 'La Cumparsita'. Kelly recoils backwards to remove his cape with the flair of a toreador and uses his rapier to gather it up and place it on a bench. A triple *pirouette en dedans* ends with a *chassé* in fourth position directing the sword diagonally upwards towards the object of his affection (*see figure 6.6*). The body position here, with length in the torso and straight supporting leg demonstrates a balletic influence. As the music builds, Kelly draws the sword backwards and throws it towards another bench where it impales in to the wood. Kelly circles his leg backwards and rotates in a low lunge towards the camera, his quivering hands mimic the vibration of the string instruments and suggests an impending battle that will weaken his prey.

Figure 6.6: Kelly in 'La Cumparsita' from Anchors Aweigh

Kelly, maintaining a deep knee bend, walks to the side, holding his arms horizontally at shoulder height, with the forearms at a right angle suggesting a tight hold in the frame of the upper body. The walks are predatory, although exploratory, as he retreats backwards into a *cramp roll*. The walks are repeated whilst changing his eye line directly towards the camera to ensure that he is being observed. The retreat moves across the right of the screen as the camera follows the action, starting over head, but slowing lowers to place Kelly in the centre of the frame. As Kelly travels the horizontal trajectory of the dance space, the hue of the yellow shirt and tight fitting black trousers become more significant against the dark red tone of the flooring, ensuring that Kelly, or more specifically, his character, remains prominent in this mating ritual. The footwork incorporates a series of walks, *cramp rolls* and *shuffles* which offer a contrast in the rhythmic quality, providing single sounds on the first two prominent beats of the bar, then increasing the audible sounds to a more clustered rhythm using quadruple note values (&&a1). This pattern is not consistent however as the clustered rhythms appear throughout each phrase on differing beats of the bar. An essential element of the Tango, particularly the *habanera* rhythm, is the utilisation of syncopation, which emphasises beats of the bar that do not naturally have an accent (tangomusicology.com). Kelly consistently highlights this through the diverse rhythmic structures of the tap vocabulary.

An elaborate series of turns utilizing a *ronde de jambe* leg action lead into a series of aerial turns with the arms extended towards a central spot on the floor suggesting the circling of the bandits' prey. A change in camera angle presents Kelly centre of the frame looking directly at the camera, a contrast to the performance style of Astaire and one that Kelly utilized throughout his on-screen performances. A series of *wings* are executed with the use of classical *port de bras* that lead into a series of *pirouettes* in second position with the leg extended to the side. The use of *sissonnes fermées* into a series of *en dedans* turns continues to follow the leg 'whipping' motif that initiates the turns shown throughout. These elevated steps also contrast with the low, predatory-like quality of the movement up to this point, as if to signal a change in pace to throw

the prey off-guard. The arm movements suggest the Spanish Flamenco style, through the inverted use of the hands when the arms are above the head and the continual tension in the upper body (*see figures 6.7 and 6.8*).

The orchestration builds in momentum and intensity which is echoed by a change in the dynamic of the movement which becomes more frenzied. Jumping up onto the stonework housing the tree, brings Kelly into a full-length close-up as he executes a series of stamps and claps and touches of the toes with the arms upstretched suggesting a matador in the final stages of a bullfight. The accompaniment suddenly becomes less frantic and Kelly diminishes the intensity of the movement to repeat a series of aerial turns and *cramp rolls*.

Figure 6.7: Kelly airborne mid-sissonné

Figure 6.8: The Spanish influence through the arms and upper body

The *diminuendo* in movement and music suggests that Kelly has worn out the enemy and is ready for the final stage of this battle. With a slow build in momentum he executes a series of *jetés* travelling in a circle, suspending the body in the air at the highest point of elevation, to present himself arms outstretched towards Grayson as if to signal he has warded off the enemy and is ready to claim his reward. A frenzied search with the head looks for access to the balcony, which results in Kelly running up the tree and using the branches to launch himself onto the turrets which are opposite. A series of *grand jetés* enables him to move across the parapet using the dynamics of the music to sustain the highest point of the *jeté*. He jumps off the turrets and runs across the bridge to discover access is blocked by metal bars on the window. He runs back across the bridge to take hold of a large curtain that adorns the structure adjoined to the turrets and runs up the stairs to the highest point. Using the curtain, he swings through the air and lands on the roof of the building, skating down a gap in the tiles of the structure to mount a drainpipe and slide down to join the princess on the balcony. On reaching Grayson, he sweeps her into a

passionate embrace as the camera quickly pans away to watch her drop the rose that she has been holding. The camera follows the rose falling, signalling the end of the dream sequence and the camera pulls back to reveal Kelly and Grayson back to reality entwined in a passionate embrace. The use of the dream sequence facilitates an expression of romantic feelings between the characters, which up this point has not been addressed with words, and the use of dance has aided the courtship that Kelly has been unable to successfully follow in the narrative of the film. As the scene ends, the camera focuses on the single rose lying on the floor – a motif that is later used in *An American in Paris* – suggesting that this momentary courtship may be fleeting and only through the continuing narrative of the film will it be concluded.

The 'dream' sequence became a reoccurring motif in Kelly musical films, although not necessarily developing the narrative directly, it was a device originally used in stage musicals, but also growing in popularity in musical films. On discussing the use of dream ballets in musical theatre, a generic term used to describe extended dance sequences, dance scholar Mary Jo Lodge states they 'advanced both plot and character, serving a diegetic function, while also offering up an elegant and unique dance vocabulary' (2014: 86). Lodge continues to emphasise that tap is not predominantly associated with this device because of its superlative vocabulary that emphasises the spectacle of the technique over the ability to convey storytelling. However, this is a juncture where musical film and theatre clearly divide, as tap, notably in the work of Kelly, was integrated into the dance vocabulary employed, although not always, and continued to be adapted to develop character. In most Kelly films, his skills as a dancer-actor are showcased in a solo, which takes pedestrian situations to demonstrate a euphoric expression of romantic feelings: such as the title number from *Singin' in the Rain*, The newspaper dance from *Summer Stock*, 'Almost like Being in Love' from *Brigadoon* and 'I Like Myself' from *It's Always Fair Weather*. This example from *Anchors Aweigh* also challenges Seibert's criticism of Kelly's apparent lack of originality in rhythms and musicality, as Kelly was not afraid to experiment

and combine other national styles within his dances, albeit MGM's artistic license often blurred the geographical lines between Central and South American influences.

A significant catalyst in Kelly's status as film star was his creative involvement in musical films. From the beginning of his career, Kelly was concerned not only with his on-screen performance, but also with filming dance for the screen. In a loan-out to Columbia Pictures in 1944, Kelly starred alongside dancer Rita Hayworth in the film *Cover Girl*, having made only five pictures at MGM. It was this film that gave Kelly the ability to combine his choreographic skills alongside the use of what technology in film-making could offer for capturing dance on film. Whilst Val Raset is credited as choreographer, Kelly (and his assistant Donen) have spoken at length about the creation of the 'Alter Ego' sequence that sees Kelly dancing alongside himself as his character contemplates a moment of conflict and explores the inner psyche in order to reach some form of resolution. The success of the number enabled Kelly to be given the opportunity to experiment with much more freedom upon returning to MGM, a significant step for a dancer who had only been under contract for three years. Kelly quickly learnt how to adapt choreography and dance between the mediums of stage and screen, ultimately realising that what would work on stage would not be effective when captured by the camera. Kelly stated:

> You have to construct a dance so it can be cut and edited, and do it in a way that won't disturb the viewer. You learn to use the camera as part of the choreography. …Filming dancing will always be a problem because the eye of the camera is coldly realistic, demanding that everything looks natural, and dancing is unrealistic.
>
> (Kelly in Thomas, 1974: 27)

This is a comment that resonates throughout Kelly's work in terms of naturalised portrayals of dance, the experimentation with technology available during the 1940s enabled Kelly to create sequences that went far beyond what was true to the real lives of audiences, and they never pretended to be. Dodds acknowledges that editing is so intrinsic to the medium of cinematic dance and can 'clearly affect the pace of the work, its sense of shape, and how the images are read' (2004: 27). Whilst Dodds' comments are referring to works filmed in the 1990s, Kelly

was one of the key pioneers in pushing the boundaries of how dance could be captured on film. In *Anchors Aweigh*, whilst his character is entertaining children with a story, the camera cuts to frame Kelly as the protagonist in the story set against an animated backdrop featuring a castle. The result of this childish anecdote presents Kelly alongside MGM's successful animated character Jerry the Mouse, engaging in a dance sequence that saw live-action and line-drawings perform in unison. They seamlessly competed with each other in a joyously entertaining dance sequence, an experiment not previously attempted in musical film before. The combination of live-action and animation is a feature of Kelly's work, later used in *Invitation to the Dance,* in a version of the story 'Sinbad the Sailor' and in television. Additionally, he used the camera for cinematic effect to contribute to furthering the narrative of the plot, particularly in the montage scenes in *On The Town* which carried the plot forward through 'compressing both time and space' (Delamater, 1981: 138) and used split screens to present reactions from three characters simultaneously in *It's Always Fair Weather*. Delamater suggests that Kelly viewed film as the means through which 'the expression of greater kinetic force' (1981: 138) became a profound element in his approach to capturing his dance numbers on film.

Unlike Astaire, who involved himself only in the dance elements in terms of creation and choreography, Kelly eventually helmed the role of director, alongside Donen, receiving co-director credits on a series of films from 1949 to 1955 and giving him far greater creative control. On accepting his Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Film Institute in 1985 Kelly stated 'there are no auteurs in cinema' (1985)[90] believing that the success of his films was reliant on the collaboration of all elements; direction, choreography, script writing, musical composition, set and costume design. However, unlike the majority of leading stars, Kelly involved himself in the entire project of many of his films from 1949 onwards as a performer, choreographer and co-director. Delamater questioned director Minnelli on how involved Kelly

[90] *A Tribute to Gene Kelly: AFI Life Acheivement Award*, TV Documentary

was in the filming process, even when only carrying choreographic duties as is in the case of *The Pirate, An American in Paris* and *Brigadoon*. Having directed film musicals featuring both Astaire and Kelly Minnelli stated:

> Kelly was much more conscious of the camera. With Fred, he'd put himself completely in your hands. He knew that you knew your business. With Gene you'd have long discussions about it, because Gene loves to discuss…
>
> (Minnelli in Delamater, 1981: 152)

Cinematographer Joseph Ruttenburg, who worked on film musicals with both Minnelli and Kelly, observed 'most directors who work with Gene Kelly give him his way. They will discuss things with him, of course, but after all, the dance is *his* business' (in Delamater, 1981: 153). It is this very fact that singles Kelly out as an auteur both as a choreographer and/or director *and* as a film star, it is his performance and creative contributions that infuse the screen with his personal style. Kelly did not work on choreography alone, alongside Donen, dancers Romero, Carol Haney and Jeanne Coyne were all credited as assistants on numerous MGM pictures, yet Kelly is credited with the choreography. The Donen relationship complicates the argument concerning Kelly's status as auteur because both received co-credits for direction and choreography particularly in O*n the Town* and *Singin' in the Rain*. On discussing their working relationship Donen has stated:

> …you can't remember who did what except in a few instances where you can remember getting an idea. Gene is responsible for most of the dance movements.
>
> (Donen in Casper, 1983: 26)

Other than his films with Kelly, and the 1953 'B' film musical *Give a Girl a Break* (1953), Donen received no further credits on film for choreography as he established himself as director (Casper, 1983: 249-264, and Delamater, 1981: 155). On working with Donen and Kelly in O*n the Town*, co-star Miller observed that Donen was particularly focused on the filming process of the dance numbers whilst Kelly and the other cast performed stating 'Stanley more or less

handled the camera and he made sure he set them up properly' (Miller, 1995)[91]. To that extent, whilst Kelly believed in collaboration, he had a prominent voice at the studio as his status within the Freed unit ascended during the 1950s.

Kelly was also astute, by receiving credits as a director ensured that he was given membership of the Directors Guild of America (DGA), a union that fought for and protected the rights of directors throughout the country. As a choreographer, as discussed in chapter 4, there was no union representation available and subsequently a diminished power in the Hollywood studios. Establishing himself as a director gave Kelly power, and most importantly, creative freedom and it is that creative reign that provides a body of work presenting a signature style that is instantly recognisable. Whilst Astaire established his 'outlaw' dance style, Kelly fashioned a rich movement vocabulary employed from film to film, providing a wealth of material in which to explore the concept of authorship. Whilst the studio controlled the image sold to the movie-going public, Kelly fashioned an on-screen persona that was quintessentially Kelly: tough talking, energetic, likeable and down-to-earth. His characters were relatable, particularly through his portrayal of servicemen, and the spontaneity of his childlike qualities when dancing for, and with, children. For all the bravado his characters may have portrayed, Kelly projected a folksy charm that made him seem like the 'everyday Joe' that he claimed he was. As a 'disparate' voice in the Hollywood system, Gene Kelly was unique. His movement style was fashioned on his own abilities, and in some instances his inadequacies, drawing on a movement vocabulary inspired not only by a range of dance genres, but also his lifelong interest in sports. The power and strength of his movement came from a physicality that demonstrated a dynamic quality in complete contrast to the lithe and elegant stature of Astaire.

[91] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

In relation to Sarris' outline of the auteur theory and the three criteria outlined (technique, personal style and interior meaning) (Sarris, 1962: 43), Kelly, as a choreographer is a deserved contender. Beyond his ability as a director, Kelly immersed himself in understanding and utilising the camera to its best advantage. In relation to personal style, Kelly, through the nature of his choreography, established a very distinct style. Sarris states that across a body of work a director 'must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature' (Sarris, 1962: 43), the dances with children, the use of props and repeated movement phrases utilised across several films all add to the Kelly style that evolved on film. Wollen argues that to identify authorship in a director, one should look for 'a system of differences and oppositions' (2013: 77) in order to ascertain motifs that do not, ultimately, become redundant. Kelly has recognisable motifs throughout his films, yet there is a significant development in terms of both meaning (in terms of how they contribute to the narrative) and in that no single dance in film appears to be a carbon copy of a pre-existing choreographic arrangement. The criterion of interior meaning is certainly ambiguous in what it infers, but concerns the 'director's personality and his material' (Sarris, 1962: 43). In the case of Kelly, as a performer as well as a choreographer (and director), his solo and small group dances represent the Kelly persona – in essence the movement style is due to Kelly's own physicality and on-screen presence. Kelly's personality was so embedded within his material that it is impossible to separate the two. Although Kelly might be considered in canonical lists of significant directors from the 'golden age' of Hollywood, it is his ability as both a performer and choreographer that establish his status as an auteur.

Fundamentally, Kelly contributed to fashioning an era of film musicals that recognised the significance of how dance could be integrated to provide narrative drive and character development. In addition to the script and lyrics from songs, dance was a catalyst that went beyond the words to explore and execute internal meanings. Furthermore, merging a range of

dance styles to create a unique style of dance helped contribute to the progression of not only dance on film but also musical theatre.

6.5 Marge and Gower Champion

Marge (1919 - present) and Gower (1919-1980) Champion represented one of the last dance teams to dance in MGM musicals between 1951 to 1955 making a series of five musical films during their contract. Marge, born Marjorie Belcher, was the daughter of Ernest Belcher who was recognised as one of the most influential ballet teachers in Hollywood during the early film era. Born in to the Hollywood establishment, Marge was the live-action body of Snow White for the first full-length animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and was the dancing body of the hippopotamus in *Fantasia* (1940). Upon moving to New York, Marge established a career for herself in vaudeville and later musical theatre (Lewis, 1995: 28-29). Gower's background was in ballroom dancing and he became a competitive dancer during the 1930s, further training in Los Angeles introduced him to a young Marge Champion whose father offered him a scholarship to study at his dance studio. Following his military discharge in 1945, Marge and Gower were re-united in New York and created a dance speciality act (Gilvey: 2005: 6-28). Gower, having worked with choreographer Alton in New York, was contracted by MGM in 1946 and danced alongside Charisse in the number 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'. Unhappy with his appearance on screen, according to theatre scholar John Anthony Gilvey, Gower bought out his contract and returned to New York (2005: 26). Resuming a career as a dance team, Marge and Gower challenged the expectations of their audiences, as a duo their dances carried a narrative rather than display an exhibition of daring dance movements. According to theatre scholar David Carter-Payne '[Gower] Champion was alone in his faith that a nightclub audience would have enough patience to sit through a story rather than merely a series of spins and lifts' (1987: 94). The ability to challenge audiences with a story told through dance was a gamble that worked to the benefit of the Marge and Gower dance team, it set

them apart from other dance acts and also provided a suitable niche that was missing from film musicals during the 1950s. During an interview for this research Marge commented:

> He [Gower] always, we always, told a story… I think part of why it worked for us in the movies, and not for any other dance team, they could do a guest shot but couldn't hold a character. We had done storytelling, and I studied acting with Meisner … my father always taught that when you finished your pirouette, you put your hands out and look at the audience. He always taught us to communicate when dancing together. The others [dancers] were so hell-bent on that theatrical kind of mimicry, particularly at the ballet, you have to say it before you do it. I think that is what also helped us on screen.
>
> (Champion, 2013)

Married in 1947, the Champions established themselves as a successful dance act that was a regular feature in the televised revue *Admiral Broadway Revue*. Gower also developed his choreographic skills for theatrical productions. (Carter-Payne, 1987: 104-130).

Signed at MGM in 1950, the couple first appeared on loan-out to Paramount in the film *Mr Music*, in which Gower staged several numbers. A copy of their Paramount contract indicates their standing as established performers with a guarantee of $1000 jointly for the first three weeks and $2500 jointly for the remaining ten weeks of filming. Whilst their salary was to be split between the pair, the amount of compensation reflects that of contract players who have been engaged by the studio for some years (1950)[92]. Their first appearance in an MGM musical was in *Show Boat* (1951) collaborating with choreographer Alton on their three dance numbers. Subsequent films would include working with choreographers Pan on *Lovely to Look At* and *Jupiter's Darling* (1955) and Nick Castle on *Everything I Have is Yours* (1952), which was the only film in which they were the headlining stars. Albeit new to the studio system, the Champions secured a two-picture a year contract and were granted the ability to negotiate their terms and be creatively involved in their projects. In a 2003 interview Marge recounts that entrepreneur Howard Hughes, who in the 1940s and 1950s was the owner of RKO studios,

[92] Paramount Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

made Marge and Gower watch all of the Astaire and Rogers pictures with the intention to remake them with the Champions as the leads. Marge and Gower vetoed the idea stating 'we were not Fred and Ginger. We had a different quality, we were the boy and girl next door and we, in a sense, let him know that we did not want to repeat their material' for fear of type-casting the duo as 'runners up' (Champion, 2003)[93]. However, their second MGM film, *Lovely to Look At*, was in itself a remake of the earlier Astaire and Rogers film *Roberta* (1934) and they did dance to some of the same musical numbers, albeit imprinting their energetic style on the material.

Their on-screen partnership radiated the mutual affection of the husband-and-wife team, but also showcased their virtuosity in dance skills. Norton Owen, director of preservation at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, observes in their on-screen dances that 'there is no typical Marge and Gower number, in a sense; it depended on the situation in a movie' (Hochstein, 2006: 54). Although Gower established himself as a choreographer and would go on to join the canon of the celebrated director-choreographers of the 1960s alongside Robbins and Fosse, little mention is made of the working relationship between Marge and Gower in their on-screen appearances. In discussing their MGM debut in *Show Boat* Marge acknowledged the fundamental education given by choreographer Alton during the working process (discussed earlier in Chapter 4). However, she also states that the number 'Life upon the Wicked Stage' resembles their closest routine to the type of dancing and performance they would present in their stage appearances (Champion, 2003)[94]. Billman observes that 'Gower was the storyteller and Marge was the dance writer' in terms of their collaborative working process, citing that Marge's training at her father's dance studio educated her in all forms of dance to develop a rich vocabulary, which in light of his experience as a ballroom dancer, Gower had never achieved (Billman in Murray, 2004: 191). Their collaborations with Pan seemed to generate a

[93] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center
[94] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

wealth of ideas, 'I Won't Dance' from *Lovely to Look At* utilises a multitude of props in a clothing workshop, and *Jupiter's Darling* they danced alongside an ensemble comprising of a herd of talented elephants in the song 'The Life of an Elephant'. Whilst on paper the idea may seem preposterous, Gilvey observes that the number is successful because of the spontaneity achieved in the performance and that 'by using the elephants' specialities as the overall movement pattern and having the dancers adapt accordingly, a natural interplay between dancers and animals is achieved' (Gilvey, 2005; 61-62). Gilvey acknowledges that in terms of Gower's choreographic devices, this number emphasises his skill at concentrating on staging movement rather than to showcase intricate choreography which developed in his later stage career (see Chapter 9 regarding the adaptation of *42nd Street*). This also supports Billman's comments about Gower's lack of dance vocabulary compared to his wife's[95], as in the case of *42nd Street,* where he was assisted by Randy Skinner and Karin Baker, who were far more knowledgeable in the tap vernacular.

Give a Girl a Break is an interesting film for many reasons, firstly its running time of 82 minutes suggests that of a 'B' musical, but its budget of $1.7 million reflects that of its larger scale counterparts at MGM. Originally created to feature Astaire, Kelly, Garland and Miller, it ultimately starred the Champions, Reynolds, Fosse, Helen Wood and Kurt Kasznar (Silverman, 1996: 181). Choreographic credits are given to Champion and director Donen, one of his first solo directorial pictures following his collaboration with Kelly during the late 1940s and early 1950s. An apparent tension developed during the production and a separation of camps: The Champions and Reynolds, and Donen and Fosse. Marge stated:

> In that film, Stanley Donen was really wrapped up. We were pretty much left alone in that film. Donen was difficult and took forever to do that backwards dance, but he spent most of the time creating that.
>
> (Champion, 2003)[96]

[95] Marge would forge a later career for herself as an assistant to Gower on his stage productions *Bye, Bye Birdie* (1960) and *Hello, Dolly!* (1964) before choreographing for several stage productions in Massachusetts and winning an Emmy for choreography on a TV production. (Champion, 2013)
[96] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

whilst Reynolds commented:

> Bob Fosse and Gower Champion, both brilliant dancers and choreographers, shared the choreography duties, and it became a competition… The men were constantly trying to one-up each other.
> (Reynolds, 2013: 214)

A simple narrative presents the director of a musical, played by Champion, struggling to choose between three women for the lead in the production. Reynolds is the newcomer who eventually gets cast at the conclusion of the film, Marge plays Gower's ex-wife and he is trying to convince her to return to theatre, and Wood plays a young modern dancer, at complete odds with the more traditional musical theatre style of dance. Particular stand-out numbers in the film are the Fosse-Donen 'Balloon Dance' collaboration, which presents Reynolds and Fosse on the rooftops cavorting amongst a soundstage filled with a variety of coloured balloons. It demonstrates Donen's ability to build upon his experiments of capturing dance on film with Kelly, with the action running backwards to give an illusion of gravity-defying movement from the two performers. Fosse and Champion perform together for their only time, the irony being that both would go on to establish themselves as Broadway director-choreographers, and the friendly competitive relationship demonstrated in the film would continue until the end of their careers. The Champions' numbers, whilst less about the trickery of the camera, present what becomes the *leitmotif* in the majority of their on-screen dances; the opportunity for dance to derive naturally from the narrative of the film and the ability to resolve conflict by the end of the dance. Gilvey observes that this motif would later be an integral part to Gower's Broadway dances citing the *42nd Street* tap ballet having derived from the ideas utilised in this film (2005: 50-51).

'The Challenge Dance' is set on a roof-top of his ex-wife's apartment and in the preceding dialogue Gower tries to entice Marge to audition for his new musical. The rooftop extends from the balcony of Marge's apartment and in a long-shot of the exterior neon lights confirm the New York location. As Gower's character says 'don't you know that you can dance circles around

those kids' he grabs Marge's arm and whips into a series of turns which takes her by surprise. A series of sharp finger clicks from Gower heightens the tension, but as he starts counting and giving instructions her character seems to register the familiarity of dancing with her ex-husband. As he builds the pace with a series of *step ball-changes* to the counts of 1&2, the energy increases before Marge spins off to face the camera, a look of fear and intrigue registering in her facial expressions. Subtly a series of beats from brass instruments begins to augment the tense atmosphere, the instrumentation hits the natural accent on counts one and three, whilst Gower continues to click on the off-beat counts of two and four. This rhythmic pattern of using a simple form of syncopation heightens the pulse of the music and gives the sense that this punctuated dynamic is like the heartbeat of a dancer. The two dancers weave around each other, each of Gower's steps are echoed by the brass accompaniment, begin on the basic beats of 1,2,3,4. As the two come together there is a blare from the trumpets and Gower's footwork now executes a basic *train step* on the counts of 1&2&3&4, the underlining highlights the natural accent of the steps on the flat of the foot which build the dynamic content of the rhythms. Marge echoes the *train step*, and the two execute the step together playing with the change of the accents whilst moving cautiously in a circle. As the movement passage naturally comes to a rhythmic conclusion, the movement becomes bigger with each dancer taking long strides away from each other continuing their snake-like circle. There are more stabs in the brass accompaniment which are accented through the body with jumps and extensions of the arms above the head. The circular pattern has developed in size but the focus is still on one another, until they come face to face as the camera cuts to a close-up and there is a slight pause in their movement, the telling smile on Marge's face indicates that she has now embraced this rhythmic cat-and-mouse game with each other. The sound of a double bass and syncopated beats on snare drums bring the tension to a calmer more playful quality in the music.

The two dancers are now at ease in their prior conflict and whilst still circling around each other, they box step, only now their bodies are almost in direct contact with each other. As each *box*

step develops, there is gradual contraction in the pelvis and deep use of *plié* in the legs, each time getting bigger and more articulated. The movement in this section is all about call and response, Gower initiates, Marge responds with a repeat of the movement. The *box step* develops into a series of sideways drag movements, the first with a very small opening of the arms, which as Marge responds get bigger until they are in a full diagonal line. After two bars of this continual play, the two come together in unison and travel forward on the diagonal to step up on the ledge of the roof-top. By this point, Gower has positioned himself behind Marge, as if to observe his protégé but give the impression she is now leading (*see figure 6.9*).

Figure 6.9: Marge and Gower in Give a Girl a Break

As the natural weight of the body falls back off the ledge, they travel back across the roof to jump onto two roof ledges that run parallel to each other. There is a small hint of light seeping between the two ledges which suggests that there is a significant drop between the buildings. The movement content is simplistic and combines a lot of stepping, jumping and dragging using the arms to create an air of suspension and length in the movement. The use of suspension and

length in the drawn out movements provides a contrasting pause in the choreography to vary the rhythmic patterns. At the halfway point in this duet the movement has been grounded and concerned with footwork and use of the arms, to enable them to step off the ledges and onto the adjacent rooftop, which offers a larger square dance space, the Champions execute an outward round kick and back kick to step down onto the less precarious surface. They leap onto the three remaining ledges that map out the space, with the last pose suspended as the camera cuts to a low-level to give the illusion of Marge almost falling off the roof. To prevent this, Gower takes hold of her waist and marks the first time that she allows him to support and hold her, again suggesting the gradual resolution of conflict by now allowing herself to be supported by her ex-husband (see *figure 6.10*). As he lifts her off the roof, he turns, enabling Marge to be supported and extend her legs in attitude and arabesque positions. They repeat the circular motif, only now the movement has grown bigger and more frantic, with a series of pencil turns, kicks and leaps into the air, all in complete unison intimating the unity that the ex-spouses feel when dancing together. The tempo and pulse of the music suddenly accelerate, in reaction Gower reaches for Marge's arm and pulls her into a series of hip lifts, her leg extended outwards to the side and spins her with cyclonic force.

Figure 6.10: Marge and Gower suspended over the New York skyline

The dynamic transformation of this sequence is reinforced by the flashing of neon lights, which whilst cannot be seen, cast a shadow on the dancers and emphasise the rhythmic throb of their relationship. This is repeated four times, before they run back to the adjoining ledges and leap off in tandem into a double attitude leap (*see figure 6.11),* landing on the rooftop extending from her apartment balcony. Upon landing, Gower spins Marge around and they end face to face, bodies touching and their arms around each other. A long enough pause is present to suggest that the final stage of the conflict is now completely resolved and the two dancers would share a passionate embrace, if not interrupted by Marge's new husband who sarcastically applauds their union.

Figure 6.11: Marge and Gower in a double attitude leap

In no way is the 'Challenge Dance' a ground-breaking dance number, the simplicity of the choreography confirms the observations of Billman and Gilvey who suggest that Gower did not concern himself with overly complicated movement patterns. However, in testimony to the effectiveness of this dance in conferring narrative substance and continuity to the film's plot, I

often show this number to my own students and ask them to discuss their interpretation of the narrative contained within the characters' interaction. It is not a complicated narrative by any means, but it reinforces the Champions' ability to continue characterisation and storytelling through the means of dance that does not detract from the overlying narrative arc of the film. *Give a Girl a Break* is a self-reflexive musical which explores the casting of a theatrical production, so in essence provides opportunities for musical numbers to appear naturally within the plot. However, this particular number is not in a theatrical setting, rather in the home of one of the characters, yet the number does not seem out of context because it is initiated by the discussion of Marge returning to the stage.

It is not permissible to accept the Champions as authors of their own film musicals due, once again, to the collaborative nature of the studio system, particularly in light of the fact that *Give a Girl and Break* and *Everything I Have is Yours* are the only films in which they were given star-billing. Gower also, was not responsible for the direction of either film, yet the creative control given to their musical numbers provides evidence of authorial control and contribution. Whereas Astaire and Kelly maintained the greater part of their later careers in film or television, Champion left Hollywood in 1955 to embark on a long career as both director and choreographer in musical theatre. It is through this progression that Champion garnered himself more authorial control, however there are several motifs in his, and Marge's, personal dance style that were integrated into his later stage works. The Champions may have only made a handful of film musicals during the early 1950s, but as a dance team they brought a uniqueness to their on-screen dances that took them beyond the roles of exhibition dancers to actors whocould portray characters that contribute to the advancement of the plot.

Fundamentally Astaire and Kelly, as both actors and choreographers, established themselves as unique individuals in the studio system. Both sang and danced, yet both had very different performance styles which are instantly recogniseable and become an integral part of their on-

screen characters through the entire film, not just for the musical elements. As dancers they exhibited specific influences from other genres, and it was the integration of these other dance idioms that helped them establish such individual personal styles; Astaire with the ballroom influence and Kelly with his use of modern and classical dance. These very forms of dance were fashioned, and interwoven, to suit the characters in the films in which they appeared and became a part of the narrative progression of the film at that point. In contrast, the Champions, who showcased a specific style of performance in their dance partnerships, were not cast as the leads and therefore films were not created on their specific talents. In essence if you put Kelly into an Astaire film and vice versa, two very different films would happen as result. With the Champions, their roles could have been played by the other stars under contract. It would not be until Gower shifted his focus to that as a director and choreographer that he would begin to establish a clear authorial identity in his creative work.

As this chapter has identified, the tangled web of authorship and of the star system are constantly entwined with one another. The focus in the chapter has been on the male actors who, like the wider voices in the studio system, were given a wider voice both as artistes and in a creative capacity. The following chapter will examine the role of the female dancers who also contributed to their own performance and/or choreographic work that appeared on screen.

Chapter 7: 'Dancing in the Dark': The Female Dancers at MGM

> The entire breed of MGM girls, which stretched all the way back to 1918, had become extinct fifteen years before the auction… MGM's male stars weathered the revolution, becoming their own producers, negotiating picture-by-picture deals, and coasting into the new era on a wave of chauvinism.
>
> This adaptability was denied the MGM Girls. They'd always been treated condescendingly, as daughters who, supposedly, made it through their films by stepping over the chivalric cloaks thrown down by their ersatz fathers, uncles, and big brothers in the front office.
>
> (Brown and Brown, 1983: xiii)

Within the first few pages of the prologue to the book *The MGM Girls: Behind the Velvet Curtain*, authors Peter and Pamela Brown make cursory acknowledgement of the gender politics within the studio system of the 1930s to 1950s. MGM's leading female actresses were synonymous globally for the glamour projected on the screen, through their on-screen images, publicity stills and articles circulated in film magazines. From 1927 to 1942 MGM's leading and supporting actresses prospered at the annual Academy Awards either winning Best Actress or Best Supporting Actress categories, or heavily featuring with the list of nominations (Oscars.org). The following years were less successful, something which film historian Joel Finler attributes to the number of leading actresses retiring and greater competition from other film studios (2003: 170-172). Despite the necessity for actresses that appealed to the public, there was limited opportunity for women to be placed in positions of creative authority. The 1940s onward were dominated by male choreographers which film scholar Adrienne McLean acknowledges in her study of actress and dancer Rita Hayworth, stating:

> It has always been striking to me that despite their ubiquity as performers (and as under-acknowledged choreographer-performers), and however often we give the nod to the collaborative basis of all

> musicals, relatively few women's names appear in the most prominent discussions of the genre.
>
> (McLean, 2005: 112)

Yet, musical films are, *mostly*, reliant on female actresses who sing and/or dance as part of the narrative. MGM's repertory company was abundant with talented musical actresses including: Garland, Lena Horne, June Allyson, Reynolds, Jane Powell, Betty Garrett and Williams to name a few. Importantly, MGM employed dancers who were featured actresses and whose musical performances were tailored around their specific talents, namely Eleanor Powell, Ann Miller and Cyd Charisse. These three performers will be the focus of this chapter as each had their own specific style and genre of dance and in the analysis following below, made some contribution, either literal or in-part, to the development of the dance content in musical films. Despite each of these performers receiving screen credit for their filmic performances, none have ever received acknowledgement for their creative output on screen, beyond being the subject of tributes in the popular *That's Entertainment* (1974, 1976 and 1993) compilation films produced by MGM long after the studio system had collapsed.

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the 'authorial' voice of Powell, Miller and Charisse to identify their contribution to developing aspects of choreography and dance on screen. As McLean acknowledged, female dancers were just as capable in their terpsichorean talents as those of Astaire and Kelly (2005: 115). This was proven when each of these female performers danced alongside their male counterpoints in the canon of MGM film musicals. Although the wider focus of this study is not framed by a feminist perspective, this chapter cannot ignore the case studies without some consideration towards feminism, particularly in light of the division between feminist film theory and feminist studies in dance.

In her analysis of the portrayal of women in Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments* (1943), dance scholar Ann Daly (1987) observes that whilst the choreographer shifts visual focus on to the ballerina, the very action of the male partner in terms of manoeuvring the ballerina becomes

problematic. Daly asserts that the movement of the male and his ability to act and manipulate the female dancer undermines her feminine control as he is thought 'masculine' and exerts 'strength and self-assertiveness' (Daly, 1987: 10). In 2000, Daly revised her theoretical approach, acknowledging that her earlier discussion was too narrow and that women should be considered in terms of their relationship to the work and the audience. This wider view facilitates the ability to look at the shifting changes in choreographic approaches, whilst the Romantic ballerina may appear subservient, later dance works explore gender roles. The plight of the female dancer in most *pas de deux* in musical theatre and film present a subordinate woman who succumbs to the advances of her male partner. Yet, Powell, Charisse and Miller all have solos within their films that demonstrate their strength and power. Whilst they may be subservient in the romantic narrative of films, each of these three dancers assert power in their technical prowess. Film theorist Laura Mulvey, whose essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (2009), explores the concept of women in cinema as models of spectatorship and adulation from a male perspective states:

> Woman displayed as a sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire.
>
> (2009: 19)

Throughout the production of film musicals, the female body was projected to audiences for adulation, particularly Berkeley's work, whose musical numbers of the 1930s were abstractions of kaleidoscopic patterns simulated out of an endless chorus of female dancers. Film scholar Lucy Fischer acknowledges that Berkeley's numbers tend 'to literalize the stereotype of the male director as a potent Svengali who transforms the dull but malleable female form into an alluring screen presence' (1976: 5). Film scholar Nadine Wills argues that the Hollywood musical, with the camera's fascination with, what she terms, the 'crotch shot', helped to sexualise dancers in a positive light. She cites Powell and actress and skater Sonja Henie of two examples of athletes that become more feminine due to the exposure of their crotch via costuming and movement (2001: 132). Whilst Mulvey emphasises the role of conformity of male directors in aiding male

gaze, dance scholar Wendy Buonaventura acknowledges that in history women dancers have been utilised to 'stimulate sexual appetite or act as a substitute for sex' (2003: 10), yet the female form of the dancer also holds power in its ability to tempt the opposite sex. It is this concept alone that propels the narrative in musical film, as dance is most often used as a physical flirtation or resolution of a romantic conflict within the diegesis. Mulvey's observations lean toward a derogatory analysis of women on screen and their submission to their male counterparts; which certainly in the musicals of the 1930s is a persuasive argument, but the very integration of dance into the diegesis stimulated a growth in the status of women; Astaire and Kelly not only dance with a female partner, more importantly they dance *about* their female attraction. Dance scholar Sally Banes acknowledges, in her comparison of Romantic Ballet and the literary analysis of Fairy tales, that underlying tones of 'female antagonisms, reconciliations, exploitations, fears, hopes, and fantasies' are present without the narrative (Banes, 1998: 47). In the case of Charisse, she exerts some power over her male counterparts through performances that see her as the central attraction, or the more dominant gender within a production number. Powell and Miller, more through the convention of their dance speciality of tap dancing, often portray a more domineering screen presence, simply because they had no male equals; they did not *need* a man to dance yet their dances often could have existed without the film's overarching narrative. Although the musical genre often presents women as passive, exceptions as discussed here utilise their technical dance skills as a means to maintain a presence within the gender politics.

In trying to draw links between film and dance history, the two seem in opposition with each other. Dance scholars Stephanie Jordan and Helen Thomas, in analysing Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments* suggest that women in this work become 'a metaphor for danger' (1998/2010: 155) and assert an imperious presence in the piece rather than needing to be supported by a male partner. Similarly, in her chapter 'Women Writing the Body', dance scholar Elizabeth Dempster discusses female modern dancers who were significantly influential in the development

of the dance form, suggesting that they redefined the role of women in dance establishing a platform for choreographers to develop work (Dempster, 1998/2010: 233). In terms of chronology, this was all happening at a time when the film musical was moving from birth to adolescence, yet the patriarchal politics of the studio system seemed deluged in revolutionising what could be achieved on film whilst remaining archaic in their respect for women as creative talents. As film scholar Kaja Silverman notes, identifying female authorship is problematic when there is so little of the female voice to examine (2003: 64), however if the title of authorship is to be transfered beyond that of a director, analysis of such contributions sees a wider scope for attributing such credit. McLean, in addressing the authorship of Hayworth, believes 'extreme competence is itself a form of authorship, particularly if it occurs in the raison d'être of a genre, as in the musical numbers of a generic musical' (2005: 142). Dance scholar Judith Lynne Hanna, whose book *Dance, Sex and Gender* surveys the role of gender and sexuality in the dance world, suggests that the dance world is no different to any other arts in gender hierarchy (1988:121). It is without question that modern dancers Doris Humphrey, Katherine Dunham and Martha Graham to name a few, broke through the glass ceiling in developing an authorial voice in choreography, but they existed in the confines of the genre they specialised in. The battle for women gaining equality in the studio system was certainly not endemic to Hollywood, but in the case of this research is the focus.

Feminist film theory rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s and has looked back at a bygone era to create new interpretations of classic films. Mulvey, looking at films from a psychoanalytical viewpoint provided a lens through which to look which became known as the 'Male Gaze'. This theory analyses the view of women from the perspective of the male protagonists in the picture and the portrayal of women through the camera lens to the spectator, Mulvey suggests that women presented on screen can be 'isolated, glamourous, on display, sexualised (2009: 21). However, Mulvey has herself altered her stance on the male gaze, acknowledging that the integration of technology in the viewing of films contributes to being

able to transfer the gaze between both male *and* female characters (2009: xxiv-xxv). Film scholar Anneke Smelik, in discussing Mulvey's theory, summarises that 'the spectator is actively made to identify with the male rather than with the female character in the film' (2007: 491). Fundamentally this viewpoint considers the representation of women *on* the screen rather than considering their contribution to the making *of* the film being analysed. The following analysis in this chapter is not conducted to consider the visual elements in terms of 'gaze', from either side, but more to acknowledge and ascertain the control that these female dancers were able to exert in their own image and on-screen performances.

As there were so few women working in a creative capacity[97] during the period of films discussed in this thesis, it becomes somewhat redundant to ascertain authorship for women dancers beyond the few – namely Powell, Miller and Charisse – who participated as central figures within the movies they appeared in. Yet this is not to say that this should not be explored, as the female presence in dance in MGM's musicals is a quintessential catalyst in the reason for the dance to evolve out of the storyline, due to the romantic plotlines central to the narrative. Out of the women interviewed for this research, namely Marge Champion, Sylvia Lewis and Miriam Nelson, all succeeded as choreographers, and/or directors, albeit during their later careers after leaving Hollywood and transferring their skills to television and theatre. In the following analyses the creative and stylistic output of Powell, Miller and Charisse, will be examined to determine to what extent the female authorial voice can be observed in Hollywood musicals.

[97] At MGM there were some significant women who worked in the production departments for the various film units such as film editor Blanche Sewell, screen writers Dorothy Kingsley and Betty Comden, vocal arranger Kay Thompson and costume designers Helen Rose and Edith Head to name a few.

7.1 Eleanor Powell

Eleanor Powell (1912-1982) was the first featured dancer in the early MGM musicals, Ruby Keeler, came to prominence earlier in *42nd Street* at Warner Brothers. In a series of Berkeley musicals, Keeler's style, both as a technician and performer, did not attain the same reverence attributed to Powell's technical competence. Powell was attributed the title 'The World's Greatest Feminine Tap and Rhythm Dancer' by the Dancing Masters of America in 1936, but biographer Margie Schultz (1994:201) has found no proof to this claim and suggests it was created by the MGM studio publicity department. Her career at MGM was relatively brief, beginning in 1935 with *Broadway Melody of 1936* comprising a series of extravagant pictures which showcased its new dance star, and ending with a cameo appearance in her final MGM picture under contract, *Thousands Cheer,* in 1943.

Powell trained in ballet and acrobatic dancing in Springfield, Massachusetts and was eventually hired to perform a routine at the Ambassador Hotel in Atlantic City. In her own words 'I loathed tap… I looked at it with disdain.' (canoga1958, 2014) Upon her arrival in New York City to seek performance work, she was constantly asked if she could tap dance. Realising that it was a necessary skill, Powell has repeatedly told the story of how she signed up for ten tap lessons at $35 with Jack Donahue, who was the former partner of Broadway dancer Marilyn Miller. Donahue, according to the legend, tied a sandbag around her waist to get Powell to be more grounded, something which she credits with making her dance 'so close to the ground' (canoga1958, 2014).

To her very last interview, Powell claimed that these ten lessons were all the formal training that she was given in the discipline. On acquiring work in Broadway shows as a tap dancer, Powell stated that she 'used to practice all the time between shows' (Kobal, 1986: 96) in order to develop her craft and technical skill. After appearing in *George White's Scandals* (a competitor

to Ziegfeld's more extravagant *Follies* revues) in New York, White invited Powell to Hollywood to appear in the film version of the 1934 production. Powell's one number in this musical film provided the screen test for MGM to offer a contract.

Powell was something of a phenomenon and a prime example of how the studio system built up its newly hired contractees as movie stars. She was a speciality dancer, with no formal training as an actor and whilst early stage recordings capture her singing, she was often dubbed vocally in her early films by singer Marjorie Lane (Vallis-Hill, 2010: 129). Film scholar Jeanine Basinger paints a not so glamourous picture of Powell's appearance when first signed by MGM, and illustrates the mechanics of the studio system as it transformed its stars:

> She was very tall by the standards of the day, a full five foot six. She was a bit gawky and certainly no actress. Powell had looked okay in *Scandals*, but just okay. She had no inherent glamour. She was not a beautiful girl, and she was never going to be, but she was pretty, really pretty.
>
> (Basinger, 2007: 25)

How did a dancer, with such an unflattering assessment, become such a popular and celebrated movie star? New York based tap teacher Ray Hesselink, who bases his teaching on the work of Powell and Miller feels that 'there's something , especially in Eleanor, very sweet and endearing about her. She wasn't a great actress, she wasn't a great singer, but so compelling and joyful' (Hesselink, 2015). Master tap teacher Debbi Dee stated that she misses the femininity in female tap dancers today, citing Powell as her hero that 'can have the footwork of a traditional dancer as well as focus on creating a dancer – the upper body, the core, the arms, the sassiness, the intricacy in the soul that you can bring to the dance' (Dee, 2015). Whilst her on-screen persona may seem very demure, Powell nurtured and controlled her own on-screen work, unlike many other women of the time. She stated in a 1971 interview that she never worked with a choreographer as no-one was able to do what she did, and choreographers assigned to pictures would only work with the ensemble (Kobal, 1986: 101-102). Her time was spent in a purpose-built rehearsal studio on the MGM back-lot creating steps and developing new ideas for

production numbers. Powell knew that she could not rely on just tap dancing, 'I would try to think up something that is still tapping but with something else. After all, you can't just come out and tap' (Kobal, 1986: 103). Whilst her early numbers display her as a soloist in pictures such as *Broadway Melody of 1936* and *Born to Dance,* later films showcase a range of skills and ideas including:

- Learning to dance whilst twirling the lasso in *I Dood It!* (1943)
- Training and dancing with a dog in *Lady, Be Good* (1941)
- Studying the movements of the matadors for *Ship Ahoy* (1942) and
- Dancing on and off a series of drums ranging from sixteen feet to a few inches in *Rosalie*

Whilst Astaire and Kelly have utilised props within their dance numbers; Astaire dancing with a coat rack in place of a female partner in *Royal Wedding* and Kelly with newspaper and a squeaking floor board in *Summer Stock,* Powell was the only female dancer to integrate props, outside of traditional performance elements such as costuming, into her numbers. Importantly, Powell also put as much time into learning the lasso as she did dancing in *I Dood It!* and in personally training a dog for *Lady, Be Good*, so that she mastered skills beyond those traditionally required by a tap dancer.

Unlike the other leading female tap dancer Keeler, whose style was a reminder of the heavier footed 'buck and wing' style of tap which appears dated when judged against more contemporary tap techniques, Powell exhibited 'class' and precision in her performances which relates to the 'class acts' that were popular in the tap idiom. In their study of the development of tap and jazz dance, the Stearns' define a 'class act' as 'consisting of two or more dancers…who perform precision dancing (among other things)' (Stearns and Stearns, 1994: 291). The Stearns' further explain that this style of tap integrates a blend of the precision lines of showgirls, the flow of ballroom and a use of tap steps. Tap dancers are, in most instances, soloist dancers and Powell's personal style combined elements of ballet, tap and acrobatics to give a sense of elegance and sophistication in her work. Tap scholar Beverly Fletcher, defines a

class act as: 'to glide and float and the whole idea of control and polish was emphasized' (1997: 28), as seen in Powell's performances which show little lift from the floor. One example, which lends truth to the idea of her being weighted down as a tap student, is in 'Begin the Beguine' in which she partners Astaire in *Broadway Melody of 1940*. On comparing the footwork of the two dancers, Powell's feet barely leave the floor whilst matching Astaire step by step.

Powell combined her balletic and acrobatic training seamlessly into her work so that it did not seem out of place or context with the overall style of her movement. Her body was long and lithe and the use of high *développés* and *battements* became a signature, as did the gravity defying back-bends which gave her a very fluid quality in the upper body. The posture of a ballet dancer is in complete contrast to that of a tap dancer, where the use of *plié* and *ballon* in the knees is in constant need to ensure that the taps make contact with the floor. Powell's stance, particularly for a female dancer, uses a very low plié throughout her tap work with a classical lift in the upper body, always dancing in high heeled shoes. There is always complete relaxation through the ankles which allows for the dexterity and speed of the footwork. Something noticeable throughout Powell's repertoire is the repetitive use of steps and combinations of steps which become part of the unique lexicon of Powell's work, tap dancer and choreography Ray Hesselink explained this to me as 'same steps… different order… it's cut and paste' (2015). The only time that this tradition was broken was in Powell's on-screen appearance with Astaire, the rare occasion where she danced with a male partner who was also known as a dancer.

The very fact that Powell was a woman, let alone a woman who not only starred in her movies but also choreographed her own numbers, resulted partly in her own demise in Hollywood during the 1940s. In her thesis on female spectacle and spectators in World War Two Hollywood musicals, English literary scholar Shari Roberts devotes an entire chapter to Powell. At a time when women were encouraged to take on masculine roles during World War II, Powell

represents a strong and assertive woman who often presented herself dancing in masculine attire; particularly a tuxedo which she wore in *Broadway Melody of 1938* and also in the finale of *Lady, Be Good!* (Roberts, 1993: 63-66). Roberts suggests that Powell, in achieving star status through the spectacles in her dances, was at odds with the power imbalance between gender at the film studios and states that 'her aggressive and powerful technique classified her as a solo performer' (1993: 76), which ultimately contradicted the romantic nature of the films in which she appeared. McLean (2009: 93) suggests that during the 1930s, at the start of Powell's career, her talent and virtuosity as a dancer meant she became a valuable commodity to the studio. However, unwilling to develop her strengths as an actress or singer, yet furthering her abilities as dancer, inevitably contributed to Powell's inability to maintain her status as a movie star. When Kelly was once asked why female dancers did not achieve the same status or stature as their male counterparts, he used Powell as an example in his response stating:

> The reason was that she was such an expert tap dancer and she could do a lot of acrobatics and tricks so that she was exciting to watch. Eleanor was not ideally suited to romance and this is one of the difficulties that girls are up against. When they dance, they're very electric and very strong… But she didn't have an aura of romance about her.
>
> (Kelly, 1975: 205-206)[98]

What seems particularly pertinent about this quote is that Kelly acknowledges Powell's talent without question, but suggests that her apparent lack of appeal as a romantic lead was the reason she did not sustain a filmic career. It seems fittingly ironic that Powell's penultimate appearance in an MGM musical, was Kelly's second film for the studio. *Thousands Cheer* was a wartime musical romance which features an all-star revue towards the end of the film showcasing a number of stars from the MGM stable. In her first appearance in a Technicolor musical, Powell was presented as a guest performer dancing a tap solo to a Boogie-Woogie accompaniment. In light of Kelly's comments above, this solo number punctuates the point even further; Powell appears on a bare stage with nothing but a yellow curtain as a backdrop performing a solo

[98] Gene Kelly Interview, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library

that utilises many of the combinations of her step vocabulary seen in previous routines, and a rare close-up shot of the feet (*see figure 7.1*).

Figure 7.1: Powell's feet in close-up during her guest appearances in Thoisands Cheer (1943)

There is no romance or spectacle in terms of elaborate production numbers and large ensembles, just Powell dancing on a bare stage. Her last screen appearance for MGM for another seven years, it emphasised that for the studio, Powell had become a commodity and could no longer carry a film of her own; she had become a guest speciality act. Whereas Powell had once been the envy of other speciality acts, being one of the few that managed to obtain a seven-year contract, by 1943 she was no longer a necessity to the studio or the musicals it produced.

In repeated viewings of Powell's numbers, a formulaic structure becomes visible as each number develops, first established in her debut in *Broadway Melody of 1936*. The 'Broadway Rhythm' finale, with music by Brown and lyrics by Freed, features a number of ensemble and speciality dancers, ending with a full screen close up of Powell's face dressed in a glittering top hat leading into a solo tap dance framed by two grand pianos and an ensemble of male dancers. Delamater suggests that the device of featuring other speciality dancers in this sequence fits with diegesis of the film, as the presentation of Powell at the end of the number parallels with

the journey of the character, trying to gain acknowledgement as a star dancer (1981: 76). In his study of Powell's star persona, film scholar Greg Faller observes that MGM framed Powell as an ingénue with a demure sensibility which was at odds with her performance style when dancing. After her third picture, *Broadway Melody of 1938*, MGM quickly abandoned this character stereotype and portrayed Powell as a much more assertive and confident woman (Faller, 1987: 342-343) such as in *Broadway Melody of 1940 and Ship Ahoy*.

'Broadway Rhythm' provides a clear blueprint for the Powell solo, whilst there were variants, this finale presents Powell as the star of the number which integrates into the primary aim of the film's narrative. Powell becomes the central focal point of the camera in this number, and whilst the camera cuts are very clear in the footage, for the majority, Powell is always framed in the centre of the screen. A large male ensemble establishes a concentric circle around the performance dance space, and whether in the use of lifting and angling their top hats, or the use of black canes snaking from side to side on the floor, they provide one purpose; to direct the attention to Powell. Whilst this is a black-and-white film, the use of contrasting colours is also important here; Powell is in white satin trousers with top hat and tails which are adorned in sequins that glow throughout the number. Whilst the exact colour is unclear, the hue suggests that the costume was either silver or gold to provide the necessary 'shine' that radiates from the screen. In complete opposition, the male ensemble is dressed from head to toe in formal black suits with corresponding top hat and tails, set against a high gloss white dance floor, that continually frame Powell (*see figure 7.2*).

Figure 7.2: Powell surrounded by the male ensemble in Broadway Melody of 1936

The number begins with a series of *chaîné* turns around the circumference of the circular dance floor to end with Powell framed in front of two grand pianos, again in black, to emphasise Powell's forward position. This section provides a trademark of her early films; the rhythms and tonal quality of the tap steps create a playful interchange with the lightness of the piano notes that can be heard in the accompaniment. Powell's repertoire of steps highlights the piano's syncopated rhythms whilst still retaining the lightness in the tone of the footwork. There are some occasional accents produced by deeper and flat footed steps that punctuate the accents within the music. Throughout this sequence the footwork contains a number of heel and toe beats which are both on the beat of the bar coupled with 'clustered' sounds that give a rippling effect. The counts represent the basic beats of the 4/4 rhythm, whilst adding sounds between each beat to create double (1 2 &3) and triple (1 2 &a3 4) note values, accentuating the playful exchange with the pianists (*see figure 7*.3) which becomes an effective visualisation of the music.

Figure 7.3: Powell framed by the pianos in a playful interchange in the finale of Broadway Melody of 1936

Whilst Powell has received accolades for her accomplishments as a dancer, there is next to no acknowledgement of her musicianship skills. Beyond the unique gimmicks evident in her many screen dances, at the core of Powell's choreography is a fundamental relationship with the accompanying music. The instrumentation is always interpreted with the use of dynamics within the movement motifs; the percussive nature of tap dance and its ability to create different tonal qualities with the use of metal taps on the ball and heel of the shoes; and the lithe and limber body that enables Powell to demonstrate the long leg and back extensions which mirror the *legato* quality of musical sections. Central to every Powell number is the journey within the structure, where the gradual build sees the tempo gently increase to the thrilling series of *fouetté* and *chaîne* turns that conclude each solo presentation. The climax of 'Broadway Rhythm' finishes with a series of fourteen *fouetté* turns and nineteen *chaîne* turns that end with the customary acknowledgement of the audience, along with a beaming smile and gentle tip of her hat. The final tableaux sets Powell at the centre of a triangular block formation, with the male ensemble

in the background perfectly framing the star, never once drawing attention from the significance of Powell's status.

Powell might seem an unlikely contender for consideration as *auteur*, but evidence in her filmic contribution suggest something to the contrary. Although MGM and the studio system created and marketed the 'look' that was achieved, it is Powell's talent and creative control over her choreography that succeeds. No other film dancer of the early period of film musicals exhibited the same technical skills, style or musicianship that Powell demonstrated. Despite the studio producing and assembling each project, whatever character Powell is portraying, when she dances she is quintessentially "Powell"; a succession of machine-gun beats rattle from the feet, the body contorts in positions that are impossible for most human beings, and the star attraction is always Powell. When she dances, Powell's distinguished performance style and technical prowess single her out as one of the leading tap dancers of this early period of dance on film. As a dancer Powell achieved the status of a leading film star of the 1930s in a series of films that were tailor made to demonstrate her talent rather than being interpolated into an already existing project. Like Astaire, Powell honed a performance style that was identifiable with herself and no other dancer and as a result created a unique voice. However, it was only in her earlier films that one could consider Powell as an author, both as a performer and choreographer, as later films placed focus on other co-stars, and earlier examples discussed here, such as *Born to Dance*, were created around her talents. Authorship as a choreographer is more difficult to identify, in part due to other choreographers being responsible for the ensembles that may frame her performance. Powell's career, albeit brief, saw her ascension as the first MGM star who was, first and foremost, a tap dancer. Beyond her technical prowess, the formative years of her career projected the image of a performer with unique strengths and dance.

7.3 Ann Miller

In a career that somewhat parallels that of Powell, Ann Miller (1923-2002) was a tap dancer who garnered attention for her extreme speed, coupled with virtuosic tap dance skill. According to tap and swing dance historian and dancer Rusty Frank, during a contest with expert typist Ruth Myers, Miller achieved 627 taps per minute whilst Myers achieved 584 key strokes (1994: 246). Miller also has the distinction that, unlike other female dancers at MGM, such as Powell and Charisse, her singing voice was never dubbed by a ghost singer, a talent that did not really become known until her later television and musical theatre performances such as the 1979 stage production *Sugar Babies*. Making her first film appearance in 1937 at the age of fourteen (a fake birth certificate verified she was eighteen years old and not a minor) Miller worked in several films at RKO for a salary of $150 per week (Miller, 1972: 60-61). An opportunity to star in the Broadway revue, and subsequent tour, *George White's Scandals of 1939*, gave Miller the opportunity to establish herself with theatre critics and resulted in a return to the RKO studios with a new salary of $3000 per week (Miller 1972: 86-100). Now established in the Hollywood studio system, Miller would go on to make films at Republic and Paramount studios before signing a seven-year contract with Columbia Pictures. The significant increase in weekly salary certainly reflected the growth of Miller's ascending 'star status', but the figure of $3000 seems a slight exaggeration – Paramount studio records for the 1942 picture *Priorities on Parade* indicate that Miller was contracted for $1333.33 per week (1942)[99].

The films at Columbia were low-budget 'B' musicals that generated healthy profits at the box-office. As only two of these films have received DVD releases, *Time Out for Rhythm* (1941) and *Carolina Blues* (1944) respectively, the films have disappeared into obscurity, and whilst they offer little in terms of development of the dance form, they showcase Miller's accomplished skill as a tap dancer. Specific numbers from the films *Eadie Was a Lady* (1945) and *The Thrill of*

[99] *Priorities on Parade* Production Records, Paramount Papers, Margaret Herrick Library

Brazil (1946) are significant because of the involvement of choreographers Cole and Loring respectively. The choreography elevated the then rather generic mode of Miller as a soloist to present more elaborate musical numbers featuring a chorus of dancers who executed movement in the jazz dance idiom. Loney states that 'Cole knew how to complement her [Miller] routines with his own brand of jazz dancing which blended effectively' (1984: 136). As with Cole's work with other film stars, Hayworth and Grable, he knew how to ensure that attention stayed on Miller, as is evident in the number 'The Greeks Never Mentioned It' from *Eadie Was a Lady*. Miller, who is flanked by a female chorus draped in Grecian-style tunics and framed by small ensemble of male dancers dressed in dapper suits and straw boaters, never interacts with her ensemble and is centre of the screen, tap dancing throughout. In all but *Time Out for Rhythm,* her first Columbia film musical, Miller was the top-billed star in the credits, on progressing to MGM in 1948, this status would suffer a substantial change. Whilst the move to MGM was momentous in that Miller received wider exposure in big-budgeted musicals, most of which are still readily available on DVD, she was no longer the star of the picture. The roles given to her were supporting characters, in her own words Miller stated 'I was the showgirl with a heart of gold' (1995)[100]. In this way Miller was most often cast as a performer, which facilitated the requirement of a musical number in the diegesis of the film for her character. Other than the character of Lois in *Kiss me, Kate* (1953), Miller's roles were secondary and did not carry the narrative forward, particularly in terms of romantic complications that the characters of contemporaries Garland, Kathryn Grayson or Jane Powell would receive. Eleanor Powell's tenure at MGM during the 1930s placed her as the central character in which the narrative would revolve around, yet her naivety and innocence in characterisation was an element that was projected on-screen, it was when she danced that a more assertive performer was evident. Miller, in contrast, portrayed characters that were more reflective of her off-screen persona, vivacious and dynamic in personality. Cohan describes her on-screen guise as 'the soubrette,

[100] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

the brassy lady of the chorus who loves men, the money, and the merchandise – she can even juggle more than one sugar daddy at a time (2004: 135-136).

It was this character-type that is represented most, if not all, in Miller's MGM film musicals. A significant difference between Miller and Powell was their approach to conformity with the studio system, with Cohan observing that Powell's 'nonconformity with glamorous protocols of female stardom was exaggerated by her dancing style' (2004: 137). Miller embraced the benefits of the MGM 'look' and projected a sensuality that showed dominance and technical virtuosity, but also maintained her femininity both in costuming and in the stylistic elements of performance. Musical numbers such as 'Shaking the Blues Away' from *Easter Parade* and 'I've Gotta Hear That Beat' from *Small Town Girl* (1953) emphasised the technical accomplishments of Miller alone, as they were solo numbers with no other performers involved. In *Lovely to Look At,* the male dancers, dressed in burgundy tuxedos and wolf masks, attempt to stalk their prey (Miller). However, they are no match for Miller who figuratively tap dances them into submission, with Cohan commenting 'Miller's dominance gives the impression that they lose their heterosexuality' (2004: 137) because of her commanding presence. In 'Hallelujah', set atop the deck of a naval ship, Miller is backed by an ensemble of sailors who, without musical accompaniment, step in time to maintain a steady rhythmic beat. Miller, wearing an elaborate gold dress lined with turquoise taffeta and a captain's hat, fills the phrases with a rapid succession of tap beats that once again asserts her dominance over the proceedings, a few directions are called out by Miller which manoeuvres the sailors into varying formations. Whilst her nature in dialogue may be skittish, Miller's characters are not naive when it comes to interacting with members of the opposite sex. Contrastingly Powell, whilst relying on large male ensembles for framing, and on occasion for assistance in her more athletic acrobatic work, asserts no control or interplay with the dancers in her numbers.

Each dancer in MGM films presented a performance style that was identifiable with both their respective personas and proficiency in different genres of dance. Miller was synonymous with machine-gun tap beats and an exuberant energy. Broadway veteran Lee Roy Reams, who worked alongside Miller in television in the 1980s describes her as 'full out' all of the time regaling a story that had Miller dancing faster on stage than the pre-recorded tap sounds she had earlier captured (Reams, 2015). Miller's vocabulary, comparable to Powell's, is repetitive in nature, with specific steps and sequences used from number to number. A typical Miller dance sequence is set up thus: the song section, a scattering of tap steps that alternate between triple and quadruple (&&a1) rhythms, either a *tacet* in the music or a drum solo which usually features Miller travelling from one side of the screen to the other, leading to a series of traveling and on-the-spot turns. This blueprint remained the template for her performances post-MGM witnessed in her many television and stage performances. The steps drew up on *paddles, cramp rolls, tap step heels, pirouette* and *fouetté* turns. Whereas Astaire and Powell demonstrated varying levels of tonal quality, Miller's were in constant supply with little definition between high and low pitch sounds. On reproducing Miller's routines, it becomes evident that musicality is not a crucial component in the construction of the phrases, as had been shown in the work of Astaire and Powell. The sheer speed of the footwork necessitates rhythmic passages that run through the musical phrases without clearly defined accents that would signify the end of each phrase. This is not to say that Miller was not musical, her skill is an element of tap where the emphasis is placed on speed and ability rather than distinct beginnings and endings of sections. Whilst this model of repetition occurred frequently, there were occasions where deviations took place. For example, in her guest appearance in *Deep in My Heart* Miller performed as a 1920s flapper singing the song 'It' by composer Romberg. The vocabulary featured *wings, over the tops* and *pullbacks*, which were unusual for her repertoire. It is also significant to consider that these steps, particularly *wings* and *over the tops*, were usually associated with male dancers, yet in this instance Miller executes them with unfailing energy wearing three-inch heeled shoes.

As with all musical numbers at MGM, a choreographer was employed to work with both the stars of the film and the ensemble, but not all of these had a proficient background in tap dance, particularly Alton and Loring, who used the ballet idiom. When questioned on the Turner Classic Movies cable channel by host Robert Osborne, Miller stated:

> Well for tapping I did my own steps and the dance directors, choreographers, placed everything around me. I did my own tap dancing. But when I worked with Bob Alton and we did 'The Dance of Fury [*The Kissing Bandit*, 1948], well that wasn't my forte, being a Spanish dancer. So I let him plan all of the moves with the fan and when Ricardo [Montalban] had to pick me up. I let Bob Alton stage everything and Cyd [Charisse] did too because the three of us together had to be co-ordinated.
>
> (Miller, 1997)[101]

In additional interviews Miller commented on the lack of tap specialist choreographers, citing Pan and Nick Castle for providing additional help in contributing steps (Miller in Frank, 1994: 247). Production records for *Easter Parade* indicate in the budget that a dance coach was engaged to work solely with Miller during the rehearsal period (1948)[102]. Whilst there is no concrete proof to ascertain how much of the choreography is Miller's and how much is the work of others, an analysis of Miller's body of work and the re-occurrence of specific combinations, reveals that if not full credit can be given, Miller certainly contributed much of the tap choreography to her performances.

The musical number 'I've Gotta Hear that Beat', music by Nicholas Brodszky and lyrics by Leo Robin, acts as self-reflexive display of terpsichorean skills which emphasise the Miller lexicon established in her MGM work. Cast as Broadway star Lisa Bellmount, the number is an on-stage performance that underscores the character's talents within the film diegesis. Whilst Berkeley is credited with staging the musical numbers, Miller stated that tap dancer Willie Covan was

[101] *TCM Private Screenings*, 1997, TV Interview
[102] *Easter Parade* Budget Report, Arthur Freed Collection, USC

engaged to work with her on the choreography with Berkeley creating the surrealistic setting (Frank, 1990: 246). The theatre curtains are fully parted to present two large tom-tom drums positioned at the forefront of the shot, these drums frame Miller who appears in the far back centre of the screen. Miller, encircled in a single spotlight with a purple hue, as the camera pans forward to a close knee length shot, becomes the central figure of the frame. The purple tint remains whilst Miller sings the verse of the song in which the lyrics juxtapose the sound of a drum beat with that of a heart beat when in love. The verse of the song has a voodoo like quality in its orchestration which is completely in contrast to the full brass sound that drives the refrain forward. The lights change quickly to a white spotlight which catches the shadow of Miller against the light yellow soundstage. Lyrics typify the dynamism of a Miller solo:

> Then I'll hoof the whole night,
> Raise the roof the whole night,
> The crazy rhythm goes to my soul,
> And its Dynamite!
>
> (Robin, 1953)

The camera remains on the knee-length shot of Miller whilst she sings, using her arms as a gestural response to the lyrics of the song. On the word 'Dynamite' the camera moves into a close-up shot of Miller's face. The camera pulls backwards to reveal a full-bodied shot of Miller as she continues to sing, finger clicks and single tap sounds are heard in the soundtrack as Miller steps under herself on the beat of the bar. Whilst the spotlight remains on Miller, the backdrop gradually increases in brightness to reveal a lighter purple hue and a staircase is visible in the background. Towards the end of the song the camera frames Miller's upper body and then immediately pans back to a full-bodied shot. The lighting changes to a brighter translucent quality so that the backdrop and floor seem seamless in a pale yellow tone. Miller is dressed in a glistening black leotard with fringing, long black gloves, sheer black tights and shoes. On top of her head is a fascinator which has black netting cascading from it. As she sings the last word 'heart', arms stretching out to the camera, the shot moves forward. A clear cut then presents Miller's feet and legs which commence the tap dance portion of the number. Visible on

the soundstage are holes cut in the floor that allow the forearms of a hidden musician to extend through whilst beating on a tom-tom drum (see *figure 7.4*).

Figure 7.4: A shot of Miller's legs with a disembodied musician in the foreground

The strong pulse of the drum, which as the camera pulls back to reveal several more disembodied musicians, is echoed in the rhythms of Miller's tap dancing. The footwork consists of single sounds as she moves around the stage interspersed with clustered rhythms of *cramp rolls* and heel beats. As more of the soundstage is revealed, sections of an orchestra: clarinets, saxophones, trumpets, trombones, violins and double bass gradually come into view. Each instrument is being operated by a pair of hands which do not reveal the bodies attached to them, rehearsal photographs reveal that each musician is standing under the dance floor, inserting their hands through the pre-cut holes to hold their respective instruments (Connor, 1981:161).

Miller moves through the different orchestral sections, which are placed in formations of diagonal lines and large semi-circular patterns. Whilst the rhythms of the footwork respond to the different instrumentation, the tonal quality of the beats does not alternate, as the speed of Miller's tap work did not necessarily offer changes in pitch. In complete contrast to the work of Powell, who, when responding to the trill of the pianos in the number analysed above, demonstrates a playful exchange with the musicality of the instruments. The camera lifts higher to show Miller encircled by a group of violins in the string section. Her triple note (&a1) rhythms mirror the running arpeggios of the violins and in a 4-bar phrase executes 48 beats utilising *tap step heels* that make Miller appear as though she is skating around the space with effortless ease. Audibly, with little change in pitch to the tonal quality, Miller can execute alternating steps that fit the same rhythmic pattern that, if only heard, and not viewed, give the impression that they are the same motif in repetition. Miller continues to travel across the left of the screen revealing the brass section to eventually end centre stage in front of a platform with staircases either side. In the wall of the platform double bass and cellos are perched in ascending and descending height order. Like Kelly, and in the work of Powell, Miller's tapping is never confined to the spot, yet where Kelly used jazz dance vocabulary to assist in travelling through the dance space, Miller continues to tap at speed using greater breadth and length in the steps that she takes, sometimes alternating with small *jeté*-like movements. Miller jumps to face the string instruments in an arrested position, feet apart and arms extended upwards. The camera appears to follow her lead and pans upwards to the top of the platform where the silhouette of a drummer and drum kit is revealed – the only time a full-bodied musician is shown in the number. The camera remains focused on the drummer who responds with a drum break whilst all other instrumentation is muted. The camera cuts to show Miller running up the left-hand side of the staircase, which was adorned with further tom-toms and tuba instruments, stopping on the fifth and sixth count of each two bar phrase to execute stamps with the feet which echo the stabs in the music. Miller eventually reaches the top of the platform, standing to the left hand side of the drummer whose silhouette is enlarged behind her (see *figure 7.5*).

Figure 7.5: Miller spontaneously engaging with the drum player

The drummer and Miller engage in a mutual exchange of rapid fire sounds, with Miller emphasising the accents, with strong arm gestures and stamps, that the drummer strikes on the cymbals and snares of the drum kit. Drum-breaks are a reoccurring feature in Miller's dance numbers which is not uncommon, due to the genre's roots in African culture and communication between dancers and drums which were 'inseparably linked' (Knowles, 2002:23). Miller's association with drum-beats stem from her initial experiences as a child in dance classes stating:

> Rhythm dancing seemed to come natural for me. I seemed to have a throbbing, primitive kind of rhythm[103]. And I had an affinity for drums. I loved drums. Just dancing to drumbeats without any music at all was exciting to me.
>
> (Miller, 1972: 31)

Following on from the playful exchange between the drummer and Miller, a moment that epitomises the elation described in the lyrics of the song, Miller runs down the staircase at the other side of the platform to be captured in a full-bodied close-up shot. A series of claps, *shunts*

[103] Whilst the quote here may be read as inferring racial connotations, Miller's comments, as discussed in her 1972 auto-biography, and later book *Tapping Into the Force* (1990: 52-57), stem from her strong interest and belief in reincarnation and in particular her relationship with ancient Egypt.

of the heel beats and stabs onto the balls of the feet signal a change in the tone of the orchestration, with the clarinets becoming more prominent. It is this point that then presents Miller in one of her trademark moments; machine-gun *paddles* and a series of *tap step heel*, *chaîné,* and *maxi-ford* turns. In an overhead full-bodied shot, Miller executes 67 turns in series that navigate through the narrow lanes created by the formations of the instrumental sections. A change in camera placement to the floor of the soundstage emphasises Miller's tornado-like speed and ability to travel the entire parameter of the dance space. The lighting darkens so that the musicians are almost in silhouette, a single spot light tracks Miller's journey, ensuring that full focus is on the star of the number. Another change in camera shot returns to the full-bodied close up as Miller's trajectory has enabled a counter-clockwise circle to end centre stage in front of the platform, the camera pulls back to an overhead shot drawing attention to the expanse and number of instruments on the stage. In a moment that echoes the battleship number of Powell in *Born to Dance*, Miller executes a series of turns and *cabrioles* that travel forward as the camera continues to pull back. Miller, now in the distance, is framed in the shot by a narrow horseshoe formation of tom-tom drums (see *figure 7.6*), with drum sticks driving the rhythm that appear to strike the drums with no hands in sight.

Figure 7.6: Miller framed centre stage by the figureless tom-tom drums

The lighting is almost in complete in black-out with the tom-toms virtually in silhouette, only Miller is singled out with a single spotlight that shows her full-body performing a series of twelve *fouetté* like turns with *press cramp rolls*. The camera quickly moves forward to bring the full-bodied Miller into the forefront of the frame, as the lighting returns to a brighter state there is no trace of the instruments or musicians and the stage is now bare – a keen eye can notice the holds cut into the floor have been filled in. Miller performs a series of *pirouettes* with *nerve taps*, and as the camera continues to move forward into a close-up, Miller changes her spot to the camera and ends the number with arms stretched out horizontally to acknowledge the audience.

Miller is one of the many actresses who appeared in film musicals playing a character 'type', the aforementioned *soubrette* role. A standard fixture in musical comedies of the 1940s and 1950s (such as Ado Annie in *Oklahoma!* and Hildy in *On the Town*), they were secondary leads who often provided light relief. During her career at MGM, Miller never had a film vehicle

designed around her talents, unlike Powell, Astaire and Kelly whose films were built around showcasing their skills. Miller was a novelty, as Powell would later become, in the sense that her musical numbers did little to advance the narrative, and essentially could feature any speciality dancer. In the instance of the film *Easter Parade,* originally a vehicle designed for Garland, Kelly and Charisse, the latter two dancers were subsequently injured and replaced by Astaire and Miller (2005)[104] suggesting that all film stars are replaceable, and in the case of the secondary female lead, MGM had a repertory company of actresses on hand. This is also indicative of the tap dance genre which, as discussed previously, tends to focus on spectacle rather than narrative driven movement.

During the 1930s, tap dancing was the most utilised dance style on film, but the 1940s demonstrated the birth of other theatrical styles of dance which saw the use of tap decline towards the mid-1950s. Miller was foremost a tap dancer who could sing, Kelly and Astaire integrated other dance idioms to create a vocabulary that, at least on-screen, demonstrated a clear authorial voice, and so Miller's numbers are relegated to stage performances due to her characters predictably being performers. When questioned why Miller did not appear in the dream ballet in O*n The Town* Kelly stated 'It wasn't her kind of dancing. Ann wasn't equipped to that kind of dancing, It was so foreign to her style, it wouldn't have been fair to try to ask her to do it' (1975: 223)[105]. Unlike her contemporaries, and in a similar vein to Powell, Miller remained bound by the conventions of the performance trope she was so synonymous with. There was no attempt to change her image, and her terpsichorean talents were no longer suited to the female dance roles that would utilise ballet dancers Leslie Caron and Charisse. In the wider context of tap history, its decline in popularity began in the early 1950s due to the change in jazz and modern dance styles that were influencing musical theatre and film choreography. Contrastingly, Kelly and Astaire also presided over the creation of musical

[104] *The Masters Behind the Musicals* (2004), DVD Documentary
[105] Gene Kelly Interview, Oral History Project, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, New York

numbers, whereas Miller has only ever claimed to choreograph the tap content, leaving the creative elements of the musical numbers to the assigned choreographers. Ultimately, Miller was a product of the studio system that fulfilled a contract through a series of films that featured entertaining dance numbers, yet could be extracted without unsettling the overarching narrative of the film. The 1930s films of Powell not only showcased a virtuosic talent, but also built the film around those talents. Powell was the disparate voice of female dancers on screen that would later influence a wider number of dancers who brought their own individual performance qualities to the film musical. Whilst Miller contributed a body of work that is still featured in documentaries and retrospectives of Hollywood musicals, these musicals exist because of a culmination of collaborative talents. It suggests that whilst a dancer may have an individual style through recurring motifs in a series of films, style is not a significant factor alone in ascertaining authorship.

7.4 Cyd Charisse

Born Tulla Ellice Finklea, the Texan dancer Cyd Charisse (1922-2008) rose from the roster of MGM's contract players to become one of the most recognisable film dancers of the golden period. Film scholar John Kobal observed that Miller never quite had the same career progression at MGM due to the studio recognising the star potential of Charisse as she went on to become 'the quintessential romantic dancing heroine' (Kobal, 1988: 234). She appeared alongside Astaire in *Ziegfeld Follies, The Band Wagon* and *Silk Stockings,* and with Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*, *Brigadoon* and *It's Always Fair Weather*, one of the only female film dancers to have this distinction. She made her screen debut in the film *Something to Shout About* (1943), appearing in a ballet staged by David Lichine. Her appearance brought her to the attention of MGM choreographer Alton where she eventually signed a seven-year contract to the studio and became the reigning dance film star throughout the 1940s and 1950s (Thomas, 1984: 145-147).

As one of the many contract players at MGM, Charisse was styled and schooled in all areas of the entertainment industry. Throughout the mid-1940s, Charisse can be seen in several MGM films playing unnamed parts which most often have a dance speciality number. Her first feature was as a ballet dancer *en pointe* dancing around Astaire in *Ziegfeld Follies*, and appearing in the finale amidst a soundstage full of oversized bubbles. She was more featured in a role in *The Harvey Girls* (1945) alongside Garland, but there were little dancing opportunities, and in a duet with later contractee Gower Champion in the biopic *Till The Clouds Roll By* (1946). Whilst many contract players faded into obscurity, Charisse exhibited a quintessential quality; she came from the world of ballet. There were no other ballet dancers on contract, Vera-Ellen who was contracted to the studio during the same period did perform ballet numbers, but also was well versed in other dance genres. At a time when MGM was redefining and experimenting with the artistic elements of the film musical, Charisse afforded the studio the ability to integrate the world of 'high art' into the more commercial nature of the studio system. Charisse was contracted during one of the most influential periods in dance on film as Kelly was furthering the possibilities of dance on screen. Ballet had continually been showcased in the early musicals of the 1930s, particularly in the work of choreographers Rasch and Balanchine, it was a spectacle in its presentation rather than a significant dance style integrated in to film musicals. Film scholar McLean (2008) acknowledges that ballet and its use in film is particularly challenging in terms of integration. McLean observes that the very nature of specific requirements, such as the pointe shoe, are problematic as they are part of the dance, yet in the diegetic of the film, unless it is self-reflexive, it is not perceivable for them to suddenly appear on the dancer (McLean, 2008: 208). In *The Unfinished Dance* (1947), a melodramatic film set within a ballet company, Charisse was cast as a ballet dancer and performed several dances, including a pastiche of *Swan Lake*, choreographed by Lichine. Whilst the film is little remembered today, certainly in contrast to the popular ballet film *The Red Shoes* (1948), it allowed the opportunity to showcase the strength and tenacity of Charisse as a classical ballet dancer.

By today's technical standards of classical ballet training, Charisse would provide no competition, she was one of the first ballet dancers who transitioned into a successful film actress. Tall, dark featured with jet black hair, and long limbs, Charisse was strong, particularly when *en pointe*. The *port de bras* is not fluid, the arms are often angular and not aesthetically placed, particularly when turning, and the splay of the fingers often spoil the more rounded shapes created by the arms in the classical vocabulary. Influenced by the training methods of Balanchine and his influence on the wider context of American ballet, dancer Suki Schorer analyses the Balanchine style in terms of the differences of the shape of his port de bras and that the fingers were more curved and on display (Schorer, 1999: *55-57*, 162-167).

However, she exemplified the 'trained' dancer as opposed the faux classical dances and/or dancers, that often appeared for sheer entertainment value in film musicals. A prime example of this is shown in the balletic number 'On Your Toes' from *Words and Music*. Based on the careers of songwriters Rodgers and Hart, the film is a retrospective, although not chronological, overview of many of the classic songs of the pair. Charisse is featured in several numbers, but takes the lead alongside contract dancer Dee Turnell, in this specific number. Originally from the 1936 stage musical *On Your Toes*, the number illustrates the significance, or lack thereof, that is placed on the incorporation of ballet as a dance form in film musicals. Choreographed on stage by Balanchine, in its film interpretation the song is out of context from the stage musical in this reinterpretation by choreographer Alton. It harks back to the precision line dances of the 1920s and 1930s with a corps de ballet who execute endless repetitions of *relevés, pose turns* and *pas de bourées*. The ensemble is dressed in pale pink tutus, and due to the choice of camera angles, the lack of technical precision alongside a somewhat loss in tightness in the synchronicity of the movement is somewhat magnified. In a more luscious hue of pink, Charisse and Turnell often dance as a duet or are framed at the forefront of the formations of the ensemble, and both demonstrate a significantly greater command of their classical technique. Whilst Balanchine set the number as a competition between the classical world and that of American

jazz, it has been acknowledged that he was the first choreographer to successfully integrate ballet into musical theatre, albeit the narrative of the musical concerned the ballet and musical theatre worlds (Long, 2003: 17). In this filmed number, it appears as a backwards step in terms of innovation, and makes no attempt to provide any such integration, resulting in a twee novelty, seemingly making a wider statement on the recognition of classical ballet in film. In two later films, *The Band Wagon* and *Meet Me in Las Vegas* (1956), Charisse is cast as a ballet dancer and both film narratives address the battle between high and low art. However, each film provides the opportunity for Charisse to showcase her strength and agility as a classical dancer and seemingly present a stronger technical precision than is evident in earlier ballet numbers she has performed. It is interesting to observe here that both films were also choreographed by later choreographers in the MGM canon; Kidd and Loring respectively. With careers that were established in the ballet idiom, their influence on the development of Charisse as a dancer is clearly evident.

Although there is no documentation to suggest it, it is clear in the trajectory of Charisse's career at MGM, compared to other female contemporaries at the studio, had a system in place to build a future film star. Early appearances in films of the 1940s may only be known to the more discernible film enthusiast, Charisse was kept constantly active, particularly in being given roles in dramatic films alongside musicals. In budget reports from the Arthur Freed collection Charisse's salary increases reflected the status she had at the studio: in 1953 she was earning $1250 per week, by 1955 this had increased to $1750 per week, a flat rate of $75,000 was paid for *Silk Stockings* which was equivalent to more than double the total salary she had earned on films previously. (1957)[106].

[106] *The Band Wagon/Meet Me in Las Vegas/Silk Stockings* Budget Reports, Arthur Freed Collection, USC

In contrast to Miller, who started her contract in two Freed produced musicals and was then relegated to the supporting casts of the Pasternak and Cummings units, no dramatic roles were forthcoming (other than the occasional role in a minor comedy) and there were no pictures in which she was the top or second billed actress. Charisse, once established, became a leading player in the majority of her films in the 1950s. Some of her earlier musicals present her as the 'exotic' character, in musicals set in the tropics of the Caribbean or in Mexico. Charisse acknowledged this in interviews highlighting the Latin and Spanish themed numbers she performed with actor Ricardo Montalban in *Fiesta* (1947), *On This Island With You* (1948) and *The Kissing Bandit* (1949)[107].

It was her appearance in the 'Broadway Ballet' in *Singin' in the Rain* that elevated her status and public awareness. Whilst not appearing in the main narrative of the film, Charisse is cast in the ballet as a gangster's moll who flirts with Kelly's character through dance. Styled to mimic silent film star and iconic flapper of the 1920s Louise Brooks, Charisse's long legs are first introduced to the audience before revealing the full-bodied Charisse in a 1920s styled emerald green dress and short black-bob haircut. Known as the 'Vamp Dance', this sequence with Kelly presented Charisse executing a dance style that had not been within her vocabulary. Kelly biographer Hirschhorn explained:

> At first Cyd Charisse, whose dancing was classically orientated, had difficulty in adapting to Gene's particular style, and contrary to his belief that she would find the steps he gave her perfectly straightforward, she needed a great deal of rehearsing.
>
> (1974: 217)

Whilst her previous dances on-screen with male co-stars had an element of sexual tension, or at least sexual interest, it was the first time that Charisse embodied power and control over her male partner. In their book on the making of the film. Hess and Dabholkar indicate that Charisse

[107] TCM Archival Project, Mary Pickford Research Center

was directed to dance in 'a seductive yet cold way' (2009: 160) and it is this appearance that created the Charisse image as a dancer that became so recognisable (see *figure 7.7)*.

Figure 7.7: Charisse and Kelly in Singin' in the Rain

The appearance in the twelve-minute ballet in *Singin' in the Rain* became a pivotal moment in Charisse's ascension to a leading MGM film star. Kelly provided the catalyst in this pygmalion-esque transition from a solo ballet dancer to one of the most recognisable female dancers in film. Charisse exuded a coolness in her new found style, but with that came strength and control, and whilst the film narrative may have softened her characters to fall in love with the leading male, in the dance sequences that facilitate this Charisse more than holds her own. In 'Dancing in the Dark' from *The Band Wagon*, Astaire and Charisse's characters are at loggerheads; he the fallen film star attempting a career comeback in a Broadway musical, she the leading ballet star who looks down upon the world of musical comedy, yet during the resulting dance movement they develop a mutual language that sees the differing worlds of entertainment begin a new harmonious phase both professionally and romantically. Mueller observes:

> This dance is often seen as a crucial metaphor for the central problem in the putting-on-a-show plot: the successful blending of the high art of the ballerina with the low art of the hoofer and ballroom dancer.
> (cited in Carter and O'Shea, eds., 1998: 200)

Charisse's strength and tenacity as a ballet dancer became more subdued in 'Dancing in the Dark' and provided Astaire with a partner that had a flexible body which bent and swayed with his every move emphasising the lyrical string sections in the musical accompaniment. In the later 'Girl Hunt Ballet' from *The Band Wagon,* Charisse revisits the femme fatale character similar to that in *Singin' in the Rain*. Kidd, utilised her balletic technique to its advantage, combined with this new found sensuality that exuded through her lithe body and flexible, yet strong, leg lines. The dance movement evoked the developing jazz dance style emerging, which was not in Astaire's genre, and provided audiences with a dance routine that still stands up today. Charisse displays an innate musicality through the use of her body articulating and emphasising the strong accented stabs in the orchestration through contractions, high *battements* and back bends that have little support from Astaire. Her musicality was at odds with the traditional training of a classical dancer, where the movement is often less rhythmic requiring the dancer to fill long phrases of movement. A jazz dancer needs to hit accents that are sharp and dynamic and the movement often becomes more arrested and angular, polar opposite to ballet where the movement is often fluid and rounded in shape. Whilst a classical dancer works for extension through the legs and is required to 'pull up' through the body and legs when *en pointe*, a jazz dancer becomes more grounded and uses the *demi-plié* to get depth in the centre of gravity.

Charisse did adapt to the style exceptionally well, fundamentally a classical technique provides the dancer with a strong core, flexibility, extension and sense of line, but it is the rhythmical qualities that distinguish a jazz dancer and it is here that Charisse came into her own. Costuming, hair and make-up always accentuated her shapely figure and clearly emphasised her feminine attributes, yet Charisse also displayed elements of masculinity in her movement that challenged

the traditional female dance partner following the lead of the male. During the number 'Baby, You Knock Me Out' from *It's Always Fair Weather*, her character Jackie Leighton made herself popular with a group of male boxers in a downtrodden gym. Kelly's choreography draws attention to her strong masculine presence through the range of movement she was given; it was athletic, low in depth and involved knee drops and lifts that saw Charisse thrown six feet in the air from the floor to the middle of a boxing ring. Film scholars Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans commented in their analysis of the number:

> In several of her major appearances (with the softer romantic character in Brigadoon an exception), certain possibilities of her persona are very much heightened to produce variations on the dominant female.
>
> (1985: 176)

continuing to note that:

> these bodily qualities seem to demand to be used in a dance style that highlights her height and authority to the full and often displays swift scissor-like movements of her legs which are, to say the least, formidable.
>
> (Babington and Evans, 1985: 177)

Quintessentially Charisse represented the ideal candidate as a contract player, whilst hired as a ballet dancer, she was moulded through the 1940s from an exotic dancer in Latin American themed films, to small dramatic parts, to the transformation in *Singin' in the Rain* that exuded a sensuality in a dancer that had not been shown in other contracted dancers. The ability to convey such a strong feminine presence on screen also courted controversy, particularly under the radar of the Hollywood Production Code who raised issues with the physical interaction between herself and Kelly, and later in a duet with James Mitchell in *Deep in My Heart*. Dance scholar Betsy Cooper focuses a chapter on the complication between dance and the production code administration, particularly highlighting Charisse's seductive advances with Kelly and the requirement for them to be toned down. Cooper's notes that *pure* ballet and the dances of Kelly and Charisse appear to receive differing scrutiny in acceptance by the production code, what is deemed appropriate in a ballet genre is not deemed so in the jazz genre. It highlights an

alternative battle within the status of differing dance forms, ballet as high art, appears to have escaped the wrath of Joseph Breen and the Catholic church, which as Cooper suggests, highlights the lack of consistency appropriated to dance by the censors (Cooper, 2013: 107-111).

At no point in Charisse's career, or in later interviews that survey her body of work, has Charisse offered any suggestion to any creative input into the choreography. Working most frequently with Pan, Alton and Loring, Charisse has never shied from giving credit to the appropriate creative personnel. In a 2004 interview Charisse discussed the process of working with choreographers and adapting to differing styles of movement stating:

> A different kind of choreographer would give you a very different kind of dancing. It was always a little different [in] style. They would naturally use what you had within your own person. They had definite ideas about what they wanted to have, and every great choreographer had it all laid out in their minds before they even started.
>
> (Charisse, 2004)

In both *Meet Me in Las Vegas* and *Silk Stockings*, Pan was credited as the choreographer, however Loring was credited with creating a reconceived balletic interpretation of *Swan Lake* and a rehearsal ballet in the former and choreographing all of the numbers that do not involve partner Astaire in the latter. When interviewed in 1976 Loring stated:

> Cyd is a very accomplished dancer. However, she doesn't look good in just anything… When you work in pictures with established personalities, I think one is more successful if you know what they can do, what they look best doing, and what they look bad doing and avoid all the bad and merely tailor what will be done on the film for them to look terrific.
>
> (Loring, 1976: 135-137)[108]

Loring's ability to showcase the talent of Charisse was perhaps best identified in the number 'One Alone' from *Deep In My Heart*. It was the final MGM film that focused on the life and career of significant composers of the great American songbook. Directed by Donen, the film presented 'on-stage' performances of many well-known compositions composed by Romberg,

[108] Eugene Loring Interview, Oral History Archive, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library

performed by the MGM repertory company. 'One Alone', with lyrics by Frank Mandel, Oscar Hammerstein II and Otto Harbach, was choreographed by Loring and devised by Donen and musical arranger Roger Edens. Certainly within the MGM canon this dance is the most erotically charged and suggestive number to appear on screen. According to biographer Stephen Silverman, Donen was not unaware of its suggestive nature stating 'it was a very sensuous piece, which we were able to get away with because we were dancing' (Donen in Silverman, 1996: 202). Whilst Charisse guest-starred in the biopic, and this was her only performance in the film, it was significant in the fact that it presented Charisse at her peak, the balletic technique was strongly evident, yet her development as one of the most sensuous dancers on screen was epitomised here.

In its original context in the musical *The Desert Song* (1926), the song was sung by the character of the Red Shadow, the disguised protagonist of the narrative. For this re-conceived version featuring Charisse and actor/dancer James Mitchell, there was no indication of adherence to the original narrative setting, instead creating a sexually charged mating ritual for the two dancers. Set in the technicoloured opulence of a Moroccan palace with a floor to ceiling bay wicker framed window with a staircase on a semi-circular circumference leading to a dance floor and a large passageway with a secluded gated entrance.

Charisse appears at the gated entrance draped in a large navy blue cape as a footman opens the door for her to enter. She is attending the palace in secret, as the footman and a later servant that appears in the frame quickly disappear. Once Charisse enters the privacy of the room, she removes her cape whilst seemingly searching for someone. She is dressed in a tight fitting white lace corset that emphasises her curvaceous figure with an ankle length skirt and drapes of pleated material to allow for dance movement. She enters a doorway, draped with beads that leads into a corridor lit with an incandescent emerald glow. Charisse's character appears to be ensuring that there is no one else in the room with her, as she forlornly enters

back into the main room and walks up the steps towards the seating area of the bay window. Continuing her search, she begins to sing the lyrics of 'One Alone' to the camera. With her back to the windows, Mitchell appears on the outside before disappearing from view, as Charisse finishes the song, he appears into the frame and wraps his arms around her waist. She responds by allowing herself to be consumed in his embrace and as the camera pulls back Mitchell lifts Charisse with her legs tucked under her as she is cradled. As the music crescendos, Charisse is lifted into a high *developpé* and then lowered between Mitchell's legs to be held in a crucifix position (see *figure 7.8*), the openness of her arms suggests a sense of offering before wrapping her arms around his neck as the two embrace. Charisse is lifted to standing taking an *attitude* position of the leg and then steps away from her lover. The lowering of both of their heads implies their passionate embrace was acted upon whilst caught in the throes of their meeting but it is a forbidden activity despite their reciprocal lust for one another.

Figure 7.8: Charisse and Mitchell in the crucifix position in 'One Alone' from Deep in My Heart (1954)

She offers her hand which Mitchell tenderly kisses before walking away with his back turned, upon folding his arms and remaining sturdy in his stance, a slight smirk appears on his face. She slowly walks towards him which suggests that this illicit romance is a case of cat and mouse and there is some discord in the status of the relationship in terms of who holds power in this coupling.

Charisse appears to enjoy this battle of sexual power and takes slow but deliberate walks to caress his shoulders, Mitchell responds by shrugging her away. She walks again slowly, but surely, as she anticipates his response of reaching for her hand at the last minute. The next phrase of movement sees the dancers intertwined in a series of *attitude* holds, deep back bends which result in another passionate embrace. It is Charisse that breaks the temptation with a strong throw of her arms to break his grasp before stepping into a series of *chaîné* turns as if to show strength and resistance in her own status. He walks away from her towards the left hand side of the screen, as she gathers her leg into a *developpé á la seconde*, resulting in a circular chase that sees her once again take hold of his shoulders to support another *attitude*. A quick turn led by Mitchell leads into a series of back bends, *pliés* and turns whilst in the depth of the *plié* to end on her knees facing him, her back is arched whilst she holds onto his right arm and pushes her pelvis towards him. The extension of Mitchell's left arm backwards on a diagonal line illustrates a unity between the dancers as the diagonal line mirrors that of Charisse, although the pose suggests the lines are clearly drawn as to who holds power in the relationship (see *figure 7.9*).

Figure 7.9: Charisse and Mitchell in opposing diagonal lines

Throughout this section the intensity and speed of the movement has increased Charisse, whilst a willing participant, exudes strength but it is clear that Mitchell is the force behind the movement and manipulates his dancer into each of the corresponding movements. The two draw their arms up to high parallel line, Charisse is submissive in her level to Mitchell who wraps her arms behind her back. As he drags her across the floor they share another embrace, as if the preceding sections evoked the biblical story of the Serpent and Eve and the game of chase here is more a game of foreplay, with Charisse clearly invoking the enticement of Eve. The two dancers have now both given into temptation and the temperature has clearly risen as Charisse is lifted into a double leg *attitude* whilst kissing her willing partner – the kiss is now longer and by the tightness of their grip around each other is more forceful in its intent. As he turns himself on the spot, the camera tracks over-head to a close-up of the couple locked in the passionate embrace. Mitchell places Charisse on his knee, as he lowers her upper body towards the floor, she *developpés* her leg forward and uses the momentum to push herself into a high lift with the leg extended in an *arabesque* line. As Mitchell lowers her to the floor, the two dancers push each other away, Charisse goes out of shot and the camera follows Mitchell to a small set of stairs. He *developpés* his leg to step up two levels and proceeds to spin in an *attitude* turn before lowering himself to the floor on his hip, reaching out to the off-camera Charisse and extending his other leg in the air. Using the force of the extended leg Mitchell spins on his hip to end in a low kneel pushing the pelvis up and forward as if building momentum. He stands and turns towards a further stair case and attempts to slide into a split before resting back onto the stairs, the body open with a focus still towards the off-camera Charisse. The camera quickly cuts to Charisse on the opposite side of the room who executes a *developpé* and open *pirouette en dedans*. A series of snake like lifts of the leg, twist turns and gyrations of the body see her travel towards the seated Mitchell who watches his prize with a subdued, but knowing, pleasure. Charisse continues with the undulating movement of her body, as he rises, she arrests the movement and quickly turns away from him suggesting an attempt to curb the mating ritual. She slowly walks away as the camera frames her upper body, a series of pauses and ripples through the upper body imply

the desire to consummate the relationship. Giving into temptation, Charisse momentarily pauses, opening her arms and body before running to a now standing Mitchell. She leaps onto him to execute a 360-degree rotation around the trunk of his body, a beautiful continuation of her legs following the body gives a sense of enveloping Mitchell. The orchestration swells to intensify the climax of this peri-coital encounter, preceding this the accompaniment present has been subdued, with strings, lutes and castanets providing a sensual undertone, as if inferring that the dance speaks for itself and does not need additional sensory stimulation.

The next phrase of movements sees a repetition of back bends and *developpés*, however the two dancers remain interconnected through the hands and arms and do not lose grip. Mitchell lifts Charisse down the two sets of stairs and she bends and twists her body when instigated by him. There is a quick change in power with Charisse executing a *grands rond de jambe en dedans* that once again ensnares Mitchell, he lowers to a kneel as her legs continue to fold around him. As he captures the leg Charisse is lifted high above Mitchell's head, the music momentarily rises in intensity as she gives a high *developpé* before falling into his arms and another deep back bend. Mitchell spins Charisse around before placing her on the floor and he turns to kneel towards her as she slowly falls into him with her leg in a low *arabesque* line. Charisse slides her body against his to mirror his kneel and wraps her arms around his neck, Mitchell pulls their bodies together and takes hold of her one foot so that she is lifted with both legs in a parallel *attitude* line, the arms are rested on his shoulders reaching upwards with the fingers splayed (*see figure 7.10*).

Figure 7.10: Charisse and Mitchell in the attitude hold

Upon lowering Charisse, the camera tracks to the left of the screen to present a series of multi-coloured cushions which he sits upon, his back towards Charisse. She balances on his shoulders in a high *arabesque* line before draping her arms around him, he quickly shrugs Charisse's gesture off and she breaks away dejected, but seemingly unsurprised by his reluctance to continue this dalliance. Poignantly, the melody of the song lyrics 'One Alone' played by a Moroccan flute becomes prominent and emphasises the nature of the relationship. Melancholy, Charisse slowly walks away, covers herself in the cape she entered with and makes her way to the gates to leave, there are two momentary pauses where she looks back at Mitchell, but appears resigned to the fact that their liaison is fleeting. She lifts the hood of the cape over her head and heads towards the desert that is shown in the distance.

'One Alone' is a number that typifies what Wills describes as the 'feminine ideal' in her examination of the crotch shot in Hollywood films (2001: 20). Wills contends that the film musical, and in particular its presentation of heterosexual relationships, is ideal because it presents these liaisons as 'written across the female body' (2001:20). Whilst 'One Alone' is that rare instance in that its concept and performance aids nothing to the overarching narrative of the film (other than to illustrate the range music composed by Romberg), it also emphasises a

distinct progression in the use of dance in film. Powell and Miller ultimately used dance as spectacle and asserted their technically accomplished virtuosity as tap dancers, one that was not matched by a male partner sharing their screen time. Charisse represents an alternate use – one that exuded sexual tension and suggested the consummation of relationships built into the narrative. Her performances were also often reliant on a male influence, be that as a partner or as the result of situation within the particular plot that instigated an outburst of euphoric joy. Astaire once exclaimed 'That Cyd, once you have danced with her, you stay danced with' (1959: 319), however Charisse never dominated the partners she danced with, Astaire and Kelly always instigated and softened the character she was playing. However, Charisse also had opportunities to dominate, in numbers such as 'Baby, You Knock Me Out' where the male ensemble provided the mechanics in her movements in the space, but never once overpowered the presence of Charisse in the performance. In 'One Alone' the status of the relationship is challenged, however by its final movement motifs Mitchell has asserted power in the union. Unlike any other of her duets with Astaire and Kelly, this dance is certainly the most suggestive and erotically charged dance sequences in which Charisse appeared, and in succumbing to the male partner provides a visually suggestive movement that was never matched by either Powell or Miller on screen.

The careers of the three female dancers discussed in this chapter seem to echo the wider context, and politics, of the studio system and the maturing of film musicals. Powell and Miller, as performers , possessed a quality that outgrew the film musical, yet Charisse, despite being contracted in the early 1940s, rose through the ranks to becoming a leading player by the mid-1950s. As the studio system was disintegrating during the mid-1950s a new breed of musical performers were gradually being introduced to audiences at MGM and other studios, which included Debbie Reynolds, Mitzi Gaynor, Marilyn Monroe, Julie Andrews and eventually Barbra Streisand by the late 1960s. Reynolds and Gaynor demonstrated other abilities in film such as singing and comedic ability which provided more opportunities in their film projects. Similarly,

Charisse's film career would continue with further dramatic roles in films, whilst Miller was relegated to 'B' comedy pictures for her last two films.

In an industry where women were not equals to their male counterparts, Powell, Miller and Charisse, whilst dancing alongside the elite of Hollywood's dancing men did not conform to adapting their individual styles which were still significant enough to command solo performances in the majority of their film vehicles. Only Powell exhibits a strong enough personal presence, both creatively and performative, to be considered an auteur in terms of both choreographic contributions and an as an actor. However, Powell's choreographic contributions were only prevalent to *her* performances, and not the other dances in the film, so there is not a significant style imprinted upon the entire body of dance work in a specific film to consider Powell as a choreographic auteur. Although Charisse was cast as a leading player in her later film musicals, the film itself did not centre on her specific talents. Stylistically as a dancer she demonstrates a strong personal style that is instantly recognisable, yet it is only in the moments in which she dances that her individual style is strong enough to suggest influence on the work of the choreographer. As identified in the previous chapter, Astaire and Kelly films were quintessentially 'their' films, constructed around their talents and creative ideas, presenting both men with similar character traits from film to film.

For later Powell films, and those of Miller and Charisse, it was the male influences in films (director/choreographer) that incorporated their styles in to the film diegesis, but their roles could have been fashioned around other female actresses under contrast. It is at this point one must consider identifying these women as dancer-auteurs, by looking at the dance content in isolation, each dancer exhibits a personal performance and dance style that is individual to themselves, and purely a product of the studio system. For Loring, and Kelly, Charisse became a muse in which to explore the integration of the classical and jazz idioms, which forged a sustainable career for Charisse as the Freed unit expanded its own form of integrated musicals.

Powell and Miller, as dancer-auteurs, rightly maintain a strong enough personality that is viewed from film to film but only if their musical numbers are viewed in isolation to the films in which they appear. Women may have become 'lost' in terms of power within the studio system, but certainly maintained a strong presence in terms of the visual presence that was established and maintained through the camera lens. To that extent, identifying these women as dancer-auteur can, at least, offer opportunity for their contributions to be recognised.

With the decline of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s, many actors and actresses followed different pathways, both as performers and creatives. Mirroring the decline, the next section of this thesis will direct its attention to the adaptation of film musicals to stage productions during the 1980s.

Part 2:

Hollywood Goes to Broadway

Chapter 8: THE BROADWAY MELODY: Screen to Stage Adaptation

At the same time as the decline of the studio system and audience tastes for musical films waned, Broadway suffered a similar fate, and the halcyon days of the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein were outdated. 1970s musical theatre became strongly associated with the more intellectually challenging work of composer and lyricist Sondheim, and the incorporation of pop and rock music to appeal to more contemporary audiences. Mordden (2003: 4-5) charges that the end to the golden era was affected by the rising costs of production and, with audience tastes changing so significantly, the great behemoth that was musical theatre could not sustain its progress.

In a twist of fate, Broadway producers would turn to Hollywood to provide source material for new Broadway productions, and the mid-1970s and 1980s saw several film musicals adapted for the stage. Earlier in the 1970s, theatrical producer Harry Rigby found success in producing musicals from the 1920s with film stars from the silver screen, which provided a momentary boost to theatregoers. As a commercial venture it traded, without apology, on the nostalgic memories of its audiences, however this formulaic model soon outgrew its welcome by 1974. By 1980, and the success of the film-to-stage adaption of *42nd Street* (discussed in Chapter 9), a new generation of audiences were introduced to this new sub-genre in the musical theatre canon. Producers would also turn towards the work of British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber whose work, beyond *Cats* (1981), placed a stronger emphasis on the singing elements than dance.

This chapter is divided into several parts; firstly it concerns the economics of theatre as a commercial venture. Secondly, the concept of nostalgia is explored in relation to its influence within theatre and providing familiarity for audiences who may remember the original films.

The third section will look at the concepts of adapting musical theatre, as with genre films, which are specific to the live medium and its needs. The work of musical director Lehman Engel is utilised in this discussion as his framework for what successful musicals require has yet to be challenged, and as mentor to Alan Menken, one of the most successful composers of screen to stage adaptations in the 21st century, offers an underpinning of components to later be examined in the ensuing case studies. The fourth and final section will discuss the relationship between dance and adaptation, an integral part of musical theatre's charm. In the musical films *42nd Street, Singin' in the Rain* and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* dance plays a significant factor in both the narrative development of the films and in their status as films of the golden age. However, entwined within the adaptive process are the complexities surrounding the choreographic license to either a) reproduce the film choreography or b) create something that pays tribute but is ultimately a new interpretation. Adaptation studies to date, such as those of Hutcheon (2013) and Cartmell and Whelehan (2010), have not even engaged with the transposition of dance between mediums. The work of dance scholar Vida L. Midgelow (2007), which examines the complexities in reimagining iconic balletic works for new audiences, has been utilised to underpin the theoretical concepts of this unexplored area of musical theatre scholarship.

8.1 The Economics of Theatre

In August 2015, there were seven musicals, either running or scheduled to premiere, in New York and London. A further sixteen musicals, based on filmic sources, were expected to open in either New York or London during the 2016 and 2017 theatre seasons (playbill.com, westendtheatre.com). Theatre critic of *The Guardian,* Michael Billington, asked: 'why now, and what does music add to the story?' (2013) when reviewing the stage adaptation of *From Here to Eternity* (2013), both a novel and film. Billington's question appears to be one of the central arguments surrounding theatrical adaptations, particularly when the filmic source is non-musical.

Terrence McNally, a student of Engel's BMI workshops and who has adapted several stage productions from filmic sources, defends that:

> Critics who carp at the lack of "originality" in adaptations of current films and books might remember that Shakespeare not only adapted the already familiar for the theatre; he was not above borrowing a good line or two from Holinshed's Chronicles of England or his translation of Plutarch's "Lives".
>
> (McNally, 2002)

Historically, many of the most well-known known musicals have been adaptations, albeit usually from books or plays. *Show Boat*; *Oklahoma!*; *Carousel* and *Annie* (1977) are just a few examples of enduring musical theatre productions based on a literary source. Even the plays of Williams Shakespeare have not escaped musical adaptation, including *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet* which became *Kiss Me, Kate* (1949) and *West Side Story* (1957) respectively. These musicals have had success both in their original productions, filmed versions and subsequent revivals. Interestingly, they are also American-born musicals and most refer to the social climate that spoke to audiences of the time. Theatre scholar Andrea Most suggests that in the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein, particularly in *Oklahoma!*, audiences were offered 'a glimpse into the complex construction of American ethnic identity' (1998: 78). Gennaro also suggests that de Mille, the choreographer of *Oklahoma!*, 'brought an idealised image of the American West to commercial theater' (Gennaro, 2011: 50). The importance of dance in the American theatre elevated in its status, and signified the importance of the choreographer in the adaptive process, as de Mille used characterisation in her movement to bring the cast to life. It also challenged the choreographer, significantly those who would assume the dual role of direction and choreography, for consideration as an author of the work beyond that of the traditional book writer and composer and lyricists. These adaptations quintessentially brought to life characters and stories that existed in black-and-white print, or at the very least in the imagination of their readers, whereas adapting a film-to-stage already plays on the prior knowledge, and imagery, of its audience.

In his survey of the development of musical theatre during the 20th century, Mordden commented that up until the 1940s there were virtually no revivals of musical theatre on Broadway (2003: 140). It was during the 1970s that the cycle of reviving classic musicals began to take hold, and by the 1980s and 1990s there was a steady increase in the range of film sources adapted to the stage.

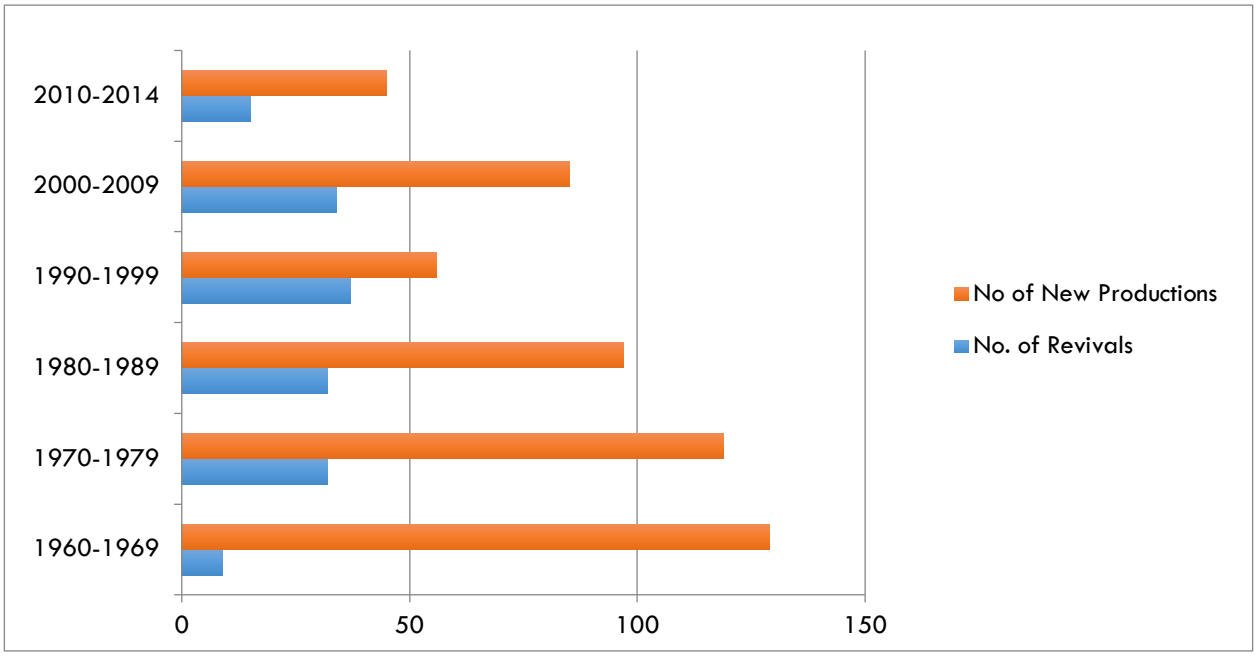

Chart 8.1: Comparison of new productions and revivals mounted on Broadway (information gathered from ibdb.com)

Chart 8.1 above illustrates the growth in revival productions compared to new productions on Broadway from 1960 to 2014. The steady increase began from the 1970s onwards with 24% of productions opening consisting of revivals, rising to 66% of revivals opening during the 1990s.

Jesse McKinley, a theatre critic for *The New York Times,* stated 'The mid-1990's, when revivals were at their peak, was not generally considered a great time for new shows' (McKinley, 2005). In 1991 only four new musicals opened on Broadway, compared to six revivals opening in the same theatrical season (ibdb.com, 2017). The decline in new musicals opening on Broadway reached its peak in the 1990s, partly due to the rise in long-running musicals. Many of these

productions were British imports[109]. Of the top ten long-running musicals, two opened in the mid-1970s, the remaining eight opened between 1982 and 2001, with three of them still running as at 2014. Similarly, in London's West End, of the top ten longest running productions, six opened in the 1980s and three are still currently running.

> In the United States today there is little institutional support for theater, musical or straight. Now the consumer is king. The public – the *demos* – is the final patron. In that sense, it may be said that the twentieth century musical theater has been democratized, secularized, and commercialized. For better or worse, today's Broadway musicals carry the full weight of this heritage.
>
> (Rosenberg and Harburg, 1993: 4)

As suggested above, theatre has become a globally successful commercial business phenomenon. The rise in the production costs of mounting new musicals has had a significant impact on the increase in mounting revival productions. In 1972 the Broadway musical *Pippin* cost $450,000 to produce. By 1983 a large-scale musical such as *La Cage Aux Folles* would cost between $3-$5 million. By the late 1980s, this had risen to $8 million with the British production of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1989) (Rosenberg and Harburg, 1993: 17; Rothstein, 1989). Costs have continued to spiral; American theatre producer Brisa Trinchero suggested that a new regional production of a musical could cost $1 million rising to $5-20 million if the production is to open on Broadway (Trinchero, 2011).

Michael Lynne, co-chairman of New Line Cinema and working on adapting the company's film catalogue to stage, discussed the drive for filmic transitions and suggests:

> I think it goes to the economics of theater production, particularly on Broadway today, which is so incredibly daunting, and is to some degree, and for some productions, very reliant on a few [critics], even maybe one critic, who can make or break you on one night. One of the strategies around that is to have a property of such presence in terms of a consumer – a property that is so appealing, that has such a history,

[109]*Evita* opened in 1979 and ran for four years, *Cats* in 1982 running for eighteen years, *Les Miserables* in 1987 running for sixteen years, *The Phantom of the Opera* in 1988 and still running and *Miss Saigon* in 1991 running ten years. (www.BroadwayLeague.com)

> that can attract an audience in and of itself, maybe regardless of the critical analysis of the particular production you're doing …
>
> (Lynne cited in Chaikelson, 2006: 469)

In Britain, the economy declined significantly during the 1980s and public spending dropped from 48% in 1981 to 38% in 1986 (DataBlog, 2013), and while showing an increase during the 1990s, it has not significantly grown further. As a result, theatre and the arts were greatly affected, as theatre scholar Baz Kershaw (1992: 208) highlighted, the cost of digital media sources became more affordable, and there was a steep rise in video tape hire, so fewer people were attending the theatre. In response to the financial crisis, Arts funding in the UK was significantly cut and regional theatres became less inclined to mount new productions. The cost of producing a musical has shown a steep increase throughout the 20th century. Revivals of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals in the UK were created by the publically funded National Theatre, and led to limited, yet financially successful, engagements. Theatre producer Robert Cogo-Fawcett suggested in his 2003 survey of subsidised theatre, and its transfer to London's West End that the minimum cost of transferring the production would be in the region of £890,000 and a producer should expect an average weekly running cost of over £90,000 (Cago-Fawcett, 2003: 45-47).

8.2 Presenting the Familiar

Fewer producers take chances, which indicates why revivals, and more significantly adaptations of film sources, happen. There is (although not guaranteed) an audience available who have some prior familiarity with the source material and may wish to see a new production. Theatre critic Stuart Miller suggested in his 2010 article in *The New York Times:*

> Theatrical producers have varied reasons for mounting revivals. For starters they fill a void. "one reason the wait time is getting shorter is that there are fewer and fewer great plays," says Sonia Friedman, the London-based producer of "La Cage." [the musical *La Cage Aux Folles*] Many plays written in the last 10 to 15 years are on a smaller scale or too tied to the zeitgeist.
>
> (Miller, 2010)

Revivals of earlier musicals or adaptations of classic films appear to adhere to the nostalgic charms of the original, yet offer audiences some of the expectations of the late 20th and 21st century advancements in technology. Kershaw (1999: 176-178) discussed the rising elderly population and the theoretical framework of reminiscence. He suggested that many older audiences wish to revisit the utopian ideals of an earlier life, which only exist in the world of musical theatre. In reviewing the ten longest running musicals on Broadway, only four have a contemporary theme (in relation to the year first produced), the remainder either evoked a previous century or situated themselves within a fantasy world, without giving any historical reference to a designated year[110]. James Hurley, Business editor of British newspaper *The Times*, suggests that people born after the Second World War spend £2.2 billion more on travel than those that reached adulthood in 2000 (Hurley, 2016) suggesting that for producers, productions need to appeal to those age categories.

The evocation of nostalgia in theatre has long been present and has been considered part of popular entertainment's ability to recapture the past. Film scholar Janna Jones cites American historicist, Christopher Lasch, to develop a clear distinction between a person's ability to rely on memory and how nostalgia works to recapture a bygone era, stating:

> The difference between nostalgia and memory, Christopher Lasch (1991) explains, is that nostalgia depends on the denigration of the present, whereas memory serves to connect the past with present. "strictly speaking, nostalgia does not entail the exercise of memory at all, since the past it idealizes stands outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection", Lasch writes: "memory too may idealize the past, but not in order to condemn the present.
>
> (Jones, 2001: 372)

Dating back to 1688, the roots of the term nostalgia were from medical studies, later referring to homesickness (Sprengler 2009: 12-15). During the 20th century, the link to homesickness

[110] For instance, *A Chorus Line* (1975), *Rent* (1996) and *Mamma Mia!* (1999) are all set in the decade in which they were written. *The Phantom of the Opera* (1988) evoked the opulence of the 19th century Paris Opera while *The Lion King* (1997) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1994), transport the audience to Africa and France respectively, but do not aim to provide a date for the setting of the narrative.

became significantly reduced, and the use of the term gained momentum attracting attention in literary and art criticism. Arts scholar Christine Sprengler stated that its association became more about 'the experience of yearning for lost idyllic times' (2009: 23). Musical theatre, both past and present, appears to support this statement, as the narrative often concerns an earlier period which is evoked in not only the physical landscape, but also embedded in the script and score. In looking back at the ten longest running musicals on Broadway, only four of these were set in the present (in relation to the year they were first produced).

Hutcheon (1997: 191), in discussing architectural design asks 'was this postmodern recalling of the past an example of a conservative – and therefore nostalgic - escape to an idealized, simpler era of "real" community values?' As case studies, *42nd Street* and *Singin' in the Rain* recall an earlier 'idealized' time: whilst the Great Depression looms over the director of *42nd Street,* this musical celebrates the showbusiness folly of the newcomer becoming the star, and despite financial woes, the show-within-film is a financial and artistic success. Similarly, *Singin' in the Rain*, whilst parodying the transition from silent-to-sound films, explores the same showbusiness folly along with the birth of the film musical. As situations, these 'ideals' promote a nostalgic nod to the escapist musicals that were created during the golden age of Hollywood, when the good prevail and the boy always gets girl. Hutcheon acknowledges that 'both mass culture and high art' (Hutcheon 1997: 192) are preoccupied with nostalgia. This can be seen in how commercial musical theatre is indebted to the earlier influences of the musical theatre canon and the presence of nostalgia continues to be explored through revivals and new interpretations. Hutcheon concedes that the emotional draw of nostalgia has gravitas, though the past is physically unreachable, the nostalgic experience fosters the desire to reacquaint with the past. It is this concept that the case studies in the following chapters centre on. By invoking the past, producers, and directors and choreographers alike, tap into the nostalgic yearnings of their audiences in order to replicate a time when musical films provided light entertainment. The very adaptation of a film-to-stage musical allows audiences to submerge themselves in a bygone

era as 'live' experience, as opposed to the distance created by the cinema screen. The success of these musicals is bound by a number of factors, most crucially in their ability to find, and maintain, an audience. Ultimately, musical theatre is mass entertainment, and whilst it projects the attraction of nostalgic charm wrapped in an appealing package, at its core this form of nostalgia is rooted in the 'silver dollar': theatre as a commercial enterprise (Wollman 2017:180).

8.3 Musical Theatre Adaptation

So why is this all important? As much as one considers the process of adaptation, the crafting of the musical theatre genre itself needs consideration. Literary and film scholars can discuss *transposition, intersecting, fidelity* et al., but none of these components is enough to examine a medium that has a rich history in evolution throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the elements discussed above are certainly viable, a consideration of the structural requirements of musical theatre writing is an essential tool for the ensuing analyses that appear in Chapters 9 and 10.

Engel wrote a series of books in the 1970s that explored a variety of aspects of the musical, predominately focusing on creating music and lyrics and the libretto. Although written in the 1970s[111], and revised in 2006, *Words and Music* suggests that much of Engel's detailed analysis is still very relevant. In surveying the creation of a musical and its constructive requirements, Engel proposed to prospective musical writers a series of elements that are 'antithetical to the requirements of a workable musical show' (2006, p284). These were:

1. Feeling – one way or another at the core of all art
2. Subplot and

[111] Aaron Frankel (2000), Allen Cohen and Steven L. Rosenhaus (2006), Julian Woolford (2012) are more recent examples of texts written about the creation of musicals, none of these authors could be considered significant contributors, either as performers or creators to latter-day musical theatre. In fact, *Making Musicals* (1998) is the only guide that is written by an established Broadway musical theatre lyricist, Tom Jones, whose musical *The Fantasticks* (1960) ran for 40 years.

3. Romance – intrinsically important to the workability of musical theater
4. Lyrics and Particularization, which help to focus feeling, give meaning to lyrics, character and plot
5. Music and
6. Comedy, not the least essential element of all theater.

(Engel, 2006: 71)

Engel's methodology is very clear and could, upon reading the succession of musicals that failed to incorporate all, or some of the above elements, deter writers from approaching the adaptation of existing works. Engel's advice outlines that the adaptation should:

> comprehend some universal quality within it which makes contact with people in general, interests them, can entertain them with characters which contrast one another, a plot line (preferably several) that concerns audience because it relates to general experience, and a resolution wanted and therefore satisfying.
>
> (Engel, 2006: 286)

Whilst dance is the one component of musical theatre rarely discussed in Engel's work, in his analysis of musicals that failed to sustain audience interest he cites the musical theatre 'ballet' as a device that has been inserted when 'something more relevant could not be thought up' (2006:286) using *Silk Stockings* (1955) and *Redhead* (1957) as examples. However, Engel does acknowledge the power of dance as a storytelling device focusing on *Oklahoma!, West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) as specific examples that add feeling and energy to the musicals.

In the afterword of Engel's chapter on adaptation, theatre critic Howard Kissel acknowledges that Engel does not remain faithful to one single model of adaptation, and deviations in character and plot should serve the musical – such as a dissolution of tension should the audience require a momentary break. Kissel also concedes that at the time of the original text, Engel had not witnessed the changes in musicals, such as the increase in screen-to-stage adaptations, or the pop-operas of Andrew Lloyd Webber. Kissel does not offer a solution to the problematic area of adaptation but does issue caution that the material, as emphasised by Engel, does need

careful consideration in the adaptive process to maintain an audience (Kissel in Engel, 2006: 306-310).

8.4 Adaptation and Dance

In addition to understanding the structure of musical theatre, the element of dance and the process of adaptation needs to be similarly considered. Midgelow (2007) has navigated through the complex terminology and methods of reviving, adapting and revising original dance works. Midgelow uses the term 'reworkings', because it 'implies a process, a rethinking, a reconceptualising, and a revising of the source text' (2007: 13) and producing a progression or alternative option to the original source. Midgelow aligns herself with literary scholar Darko Suvin (1988) who suggests that while there may be limitations to how a text is interpreted, its staging offers countless creative opportunities. Suvin identifies these interpretations as *variants, adaptations,* and *rewrites* (Suvin, 1988: 409), stating that any presentation is a variant of the source if it utilises the structural components of the source text. He establishes adaptations as a product that creates a 'family likeness' by employing only traces of the structural elements of the original. Rewrites are works, in Suvin's hypothesis, that have a minimal trace of the original structure and whose interpretations have 'a radically differing purpose' (Suvin, 1988: 410). Suvin's hypotheses align well with musical theatre as a mode of adaptation because, in most cases, the inherent 'theme' or 'idea' of the source is maintained in the staged interpretation. Drama Scholar Julie Sanders suggests that adaptation offers 'commentary on a sourcetext' and allows for creativity in discovering a new pathway in its interpretation, or simply put, 'make texts relevant' to a different audience (Sanders, 2006: 18-19). Midgelow's rationale for the term 'reworkings' sits well in the analysis of the dance components mainly because it expresses 'a multifaceted identity, an identity which considers tradition while refusing to be locked under the sign 'authenticity" (2007: 31). However, this is problematic when applied to the wider sphere of transposing between different mediums.

Oklahoma! has undergone several revivals during the 40 years that followed its premiere, each one being a faithful reproduction of the original. In 1999 director Trevor Nunn and choreographer Susan Stroman presented a new interpretation of the piece, markedly noticeable as being the first production not to feature de Mille's choreography, a feat that required the permission of the Rodgers and Hammerstein organisation. The musicals from the 1940s often reflect on real people and situations that arise within the social structure prevalent at the time. Irrespective of the period in which they are set, they still have a unifying ability to speak to the audience. In discussing his work on the revival, director Nunn stated the appeal to re-examining the musical came through its theme of community and the battles prevailed on by the farmers and cowmen:

> in which there's no law and no authority, and somehow the community has to prove itself worthy of the land. Common sense, justice, equality and decency have to prevail.
>
> (Nunn cited in Nightingale, 2002)

Whilst the revivalist culture of musical theatre has come to prominence during the latter 20th century and early 21st century, many of these have been re-interpreted to appeal to modern day audiences. British directors have been more prominent in re-addressing the canon, perhaps because the history surrounding the initial creation is not part of British theatre history, the National Theatre being the most prolific. As theatre scholar Miranda Lunskaer-Neilsen states 'we need to acknowledge that the original production is just one of several possible embodiments of the show itself as defined by the libretto and score' (2008:113). Her survey on the revivalist culture in musical theatre acknowledges that these re-interpretations are designed to appeal to newer audiences with differing sensibilities and expectations. Bennett, in discussing the presentation of Shakespearean texts to contemporary audiences, adds to this by stating, 'they rely on willing audiences who are attracted to the event for its innovation with and renovation of the text' (1996: 20). Much of the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon has been re-visited over the last 20 years featuring re-interpretations that focus more on the drawing out

both the cultural inaccuracies of the original, as in the 1996 revival of *The King and I* (1951) and the domestic abuse that prevails among the protagonists in the 1993 production of *Carousel*. These two examples provide an interesting contrast in that the physical landscapes of both productions captured the settings of each musical with a more contemporary approach, yet *The King and I* replicated the original choreography of Robbins, whilst similarly to *Oklahoma!* the choreography for *Carousel* was reflective of the darker elements of the story that the musical presented. So, if the original choreography or Robbins is deemed suitable for a 1996 revival, why is the 1945 original of de Mille not felt suitable for a 1993 revival? Hence, we now enter the complicated protocol that seems to pervade the production of these revivals. The term revival seems to be an ambiguous phrase that serves a purpose rather than providing a clear definition. Midgelow's use of the term 're-workings' sits well within this framework as, whilst the source material is employed as a catalyst, there is scope to deviate from the original. The revival of a pure dance work perhaps evades some of the complication that a musical has, due to the fact that it is the choreographer's vision alone that can recreate, adapt, and in the Midgelow's words, re-work.

Musical theatre is more complicated due to the nature of dealing with spoken text and music and lyrics, which, whilst offering scope in delivery, dictate a significant element in the direction and physical production. In *The King and I* it could be perceived that Robbins' choreography, whilst not authentic in its presentation of Eastern dance styles, does suggest and contribute to the dramatic intentions as envisioned by the revivals director, Christoper Renshaw. It is also certain that the Robbins estate protects the work of Robbins and therefore the choreography has to be recreated in any professional production[112]. The choreography de Mille created in musicals, whilst innovative for the time, is littered with a vocabulary that is bound by the

[112]See Anthea Kraut's *Choreographing Copyright: Race, Gender, and Intellectual Property Rights in American Dance* (2016) for a detailed examination of the complex issues surrounding the protection of dance work as intellectual property.

emerging style of modern and classical dance that was in development by the 1940s. Vocabulary in dance has seen significant growth in the last 50 years and as a result could further develop the narrative intention of these revivals. On discussing Stromans' work on *Oklahoma!,* Nunn felt that he needed:

> Someone who would have authority and understanding both of the musical and choreographic styles that were suggested by the work. I also wanted someone who was very individual and irreverent, who wouldn't seem in awe and therefore in the shadow of what was done previously.
>
> (cited in Ostlere, 1999)

Whilst original choreography can be strictly protected and *Oklahoma!* certainly is credited with paving the way for the integration of dance in the musical play, not all of the de Mille choreography progresses the narrative further. Upon speaking about the 1999 National Theatre revival, Theodore S. Chapin, the president of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, qualified his reason for allowing the choreography to be changed as thus:

> Agnes didn't have much regard for the other songs, dismissing 'Kansas City' with, 'Oh, get someone in California; they do a good two-step.' She didn't like 'People Will Say We're in Love,' which interestingly in the original appeared nowhere in the dance music or the ballet."
>
> (cited in Ostlere, 1999)

As well as all new choreography in Stroman's version of *Oklahoma!*, a significant change to the Dream Ballet was also addressed. In the de Mille version, two dancers substituted for the characters of Laurey and Curly, however Stroman cast two actors who could also dance. On making this change she suggested:

> I'd say now an audience sees theatre with a more cinematic eye, where the story has to be told all of the time, all the way through, even in transitions. In the case of *Oklahoma!*, the older audience accepted that all of a sudden a Curly and Laurey that you'd never seen before came out and danced. I didn't feel a contemporary audience would accept that.
>
> (Stroman in Cramer, 2013: 212).

Stroman's comments here on her approach to the 1999 production come over twenty years after she established herself as a Broadway choreography and make a strong connection with what

the audience needs, or wants. Whether a revival, or an adaptation of a film, familiarity with the original source is evident throughout the discussions in this chapter. In the case of *Oklahoma!*, rather than disintegrating the memory of the original, Stroman gave an alternative that continued to aid the character development and narrative functions established by de Mille. Stroman has been involved in four adaptations of film-to-stage musicals, namely *The Producers* (2001) and *Young Frankenstein* (2006), both of which were originally written by comedian Mel Brooks. Whilst Brooks wrote the book for the stage adaptations, Stroman was at the helm as director and choreographer, and through the unity of both roles authored musicals that honoured the original films yet paved the way for more creative outlets for the inclusion of dance numbers.

In navigating through some of the discussions surrounding adaptation, there is yet to be a single model that fits all interpretations. For the ensuing case studies Engel's methodology provides the framework through which to examine the adaptation process. The dance analysis is based on Midgelow's and Darko's suggestions of 'reworking' and 'interpretation' as the catalyst from which the choreographer can develop a creative voice based on existing material.

Chapter 9: Go Into Your Dance: 42nd Street on Stage

The transposition and adaptation of film musicals to stage productions was not a recent innovation of the late 20th century, for some of the most successful musicals of the 1960s and 1970s drew from cinematic sources: *Carnival!* (1961), *Sweet Charity* (1966) and *A Little Night Music* (1973). In the book, *Not Since Carrie* (1991), theatre critic Ken Mandelbaum details 40-years' worth of flop musical productions on Broadway. The chapter 'The Movie Was Better' examines many of the productions based on both musical and non-musical films suggesting that some were 'so lacking in creative impulse that it might have been better to simply lower the screen and show the film' (1991: 156). Drawing from the MGM canon, several musical productions were staged during the 1970's and 1980s, although in 1961 an adaptation of the 1953 film *Lili* opened on Broadway, highlighting a first for an MGM musical film to be adapted. Deviating substantially from the original film, with a new score, the musical was directed by Gower Champion and ran for almost two years. *Gigi* (1973) based upon the Academy-Award winning 1958 film directed by Vincente Minnelli would not follow with the same success, running for only 103 performances, similarly a 2015 revival failed to find an audience and ran for only 86 performances (ibdb.com). *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* was adapted into a musical for a 1978 tour featuring the original film-stars, Jane Powell and Howard Keel. A subsequent tour opened on Broadway in 1982 managing a run of five performances, later staging's of *Singin' in the Rain* (1985, 367 perf.) and *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1989, 252 perf.) seemed to fair better (ibdb.com). Whilst the MGM film canon failed to register an audience or attain long-running success on-stage, it was an almost 50-year old black and white film that would contribute to a change in the musical theatre canon, thus establishing a genre of adaptations drawn from filmic sources.

42nd Street, based on the 1933 Warner Brothers film musical, made its Broadway debut on 25th August 1980 winning Tony Awards for Best Musical and Best Choreography (ibdb.com). Directed and choreographed by Gower Champion, the original production ran for over eight years, with subsequent productions in the UK, Australia and numerous tours, proving that Hollywood has the potential to provide source material to creative teams. This chapter will examine the adaptive process of translating the visual work of director and choreographer Busby Berkeley in to a different medium. Throughout the analysis the discussion will interchange between the original 1932 novel, the 1933 film source and the 1980 and 2001 stage productions.

As of January 2017 *42nd Street* is currently the fourteenth longest running Broadway musical of all time, playing 3,486 performances (playbill.com) and a revival of the musical opened in London in April 2017. This begs the question of what made an 80-year-old film so successful as a stage musical? Was it because the legendary director and choreographer Champion died of a Leukaemia related illness on its 1980 premiere? A fact that was famously announced by the producer David Merrick to a stunned audience after the final bows, or is it due to how it provided audiences with an old-fashioned musical comedy, something that was missing in the slew of productions appearing on Broadway at the time? Or was it because the subject of the film was quintessentially about the business called 'show'?

What makes *42nd Street* so significant as a case study is that, thematically speaking, it is about the theatre industry, which suggests a plausible reason for its adaptation to stage, certainly more so than *Singin' in the Rain,* which explores the transition of sound into film in the 1920s. Theatre scholar Russell Jackson acknowledges cinema's continual fascination with the theatre, stating 'the theatre building, with its demarcations between front-of-house, stage and backstage areas, is a rich source not only for social detail but also symbolic meanings' (2013: 26).

This is particularly evident in the work of Hollywood choreographer Busby Berkeley. Warner Brothers' musical *42nd Street* is considered a pinnacle in defining the backstage musical genre in cinema (Rubin, 1993: 35). Whilst many of Berkeley's production numbers are set within a theatrical context, it is evident that once the camera moves past the proscenium arch, these are stages that could never physically work in a live theatrical setting. Berkeley took the camera above the dancers, and is synonymous with the kaleidoscopic visual patterns that he manoeuvred his dancers into abstracting and fragmenting them. Barrios (2010: 364) suggested that 'by exercising full license to stage numbers not possible in any theater, Berkeley gave musical film a fresh complexion'.

The camera became an active participant in the choreography, emphasising any viewpoint it wishes (and through direction of Berkeley) and actively taking the audience on a journey with the camera as it scanned past the bevy of dancing 'girls' that became part of the Berkeley lexicon. However, within a theatre auditorium the audience is confined to their given seat and the opportunity to become involved in the action is restricted by the fourth wall created by the proscenium arch. In an interview with Hesselink, who has adapted several screen dances to stage for concert performances, he felt:

> It is tricky translating from film to stage because they are different worlds, different genres, different perspectives. The camera tells you where you need to look and on the stage the director knows how to, along with lighting director, to focus your attention.
>
> (Hesselink, 2015)

Therefore, director-choreographer Champion was such an informed choice for this production. His career included a series of films with his then wife, Marge, at MGM in the 1950s, followed by a prolific career on Broadway as an instrumental figure in the canon of director-choreographers during the 1960s alongside Robbins and Fosse. Whilst not having an identifiable movement style, such as that of Fosse, Champion brought a cinematic sensibility to his stage productions. Forgoing the continual need for a scene to play in front of a tab curtain,

Champion staged the book and numbers so that the transitions happened organically and seamlessly through a combination of movement and music. His experience working with film to stage adaptations was also instrumental, having worked on *Sugar* (1973) which was based on *Some Like it Hot* (1959), and the 1974 flop *Mack and Mabel* which was about Hollywood and the making of silent films. A motif that featured in many of his stage musicals was the ability to transport an audience from one location to another during a single musical number. In *Hello, Dolly!* (1964) 'Put on Your Sunday Clothes' took the audience, via an on-stage train, from Yonkers to New York City, and in *42nd Street*, through the device of having the cast walk in concentric circles around the centre of the stage, 'Getting Out of Town' took the action from New York City to Philadelphia. A simple device, but all the same effective in place of the smooth filmic transition from one location to another. (Gilvey, 2005:128-130, 286). In an interview with actor Lee Roy Reams, who played Billy Lawlor in the original Broadway production of *42nd* Street, he felt that Champion was a genius and brought to the stage his understanding of presenting dance on film. Reams stated:

> He had such a clean style of dancing, it was very balletic in the upper body, but he knew how to move… like the 'Dancing' number in Dolly [*Hello, Dolly!* (1964)] is so brilliant, it starts in a hat shop, then goes out onto the street, it ends up going into the next scene. He was brilliant at that cinematic sweep that he did all with the dancing.
>
> (Reams, 2015)

Whilst *42nd Street* became the last Champion musical on Broadway, it encapsulated all the knowledge gained in his Broadway career and returned to the roots of the staging conventions that had gained him early recognition.

9.1 The 1932 novel and 1933 film

With the advent of sound in motion pictures, the birth of the musical film as its own genre in Hollywood history began in 1928 with Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer,* coming to its fruition with MGM's *The Broadway Melody* which was the first full all-talking musical film. Yet by 1930, as noted by Richard Barrios (2010: 35), audiences began to tire of the formulas created by the

studios for musical films. *42nd Street* was based on a 1932 novel of the same name by an inexperienced author and chorus dancer, Bradford Ropes. It charted the making of a fictitious musical comedy called *Pretty Lady*, focusing on an assortment of characters, both on and off stage, and their entangled personal and professional lives. The language of Ropes' novel is colloquial and tries to capture the 'real' rehearsal process of a musical production with some colourful sentences such as below:

> Why don't you park your dogs for a coupla minutes? The old bastard's gonna start in hot an' heavy as soon as he gets his second wind.
> (Ropes, 1932: 106)

There is a familiarity about Ropes' writing that invites the reader into the rehearsal process, with no inhibitions to paint a picture of the 'real' world of theatre as opposed to the all too oft glossy alternative account Hollywood had been presenting. Prior to the interference of the Hollywood Production code, the early Warner Brothers musicals are far grittier, and suggestive, than they would later become.

There are far more characters and sub-plots in the original novel than are presented in the film. The character of Peggy Sawyer, the inexperienced ingénue who becomes an overnight star, is particularly more developed than in the screenplay. On screen, she is presented as a naïve chorus girl who does not exhibit much in terms of personality, and one wonders as to why she is chosen to become the replacement for the ailing star of the musical. Yet the casting of Ruby Keeler provided the story with the character of a dancer who possessed talent as a tap dancer, having far more technical proficiency than the other film stars around her. However, in the novel Peggy is already part of the cast and struggles to get to grips with the routines choreographed. At one point in the novel, during the rehearsal process Peggy exclaims 'I'm so stupid… every one of the chorus girls can dance rings around me' (Ropes, 1932: 107). Film scholar Rocco Fumento, in his analyses of several versions of the film screenplay, acknowledges that the narrative does not indicate why Peggy Sawyer is picked from the chorus (Fumento, 1980: 180).

In contrast, the stage adaptation addresses this weakness in the film and makes clear from Peggy's first entrance that she has talent beyond the capabilities of being a chorus dancer. During the second act the character of Ann 'Anytime' Reilly exclaims of Peggy that 'she's got a voice that'll panic 'em and she can dance rings around Brock' (Stewart and Bramble, 1980: 2-2-5). Whilst mention is made of Peggy being a new-comer to show-business, greater emphasis is paid to her romantic entanglements in the novel with several male characters, rather than in telling a story of theatrical folklore that the film and later stage musical focus on. The novel, in no way a masterpiece, is gritty and attempts to present the cynical and somewhat racy attitudes of its characters.

As Hollywood films up to 1934 were still exempt from the impending Hollywood Production Code, which was to control the content and its suitability for audiences, *42nd Street* certainly reflects the slightly more risqué backstage antics that would eventually be censored from film audiences. Historically, the making of the film was aligned with Franklin D. Roosevelt's election campaign and released in 1933. It coincided with the passing of the National Recovery Act from Congress which film scholar J. Hoberman suggests makes the film a reflection of American social history (1993: 68). The screenplay acknowledges the Great Depression, but also offers escape with its elaborate Berkeley production numbers together with a plot that had 'a Depression era urgency and an almost melancholy energy that somehow made the backstage film seem fresh all over again' (Barrios, 2010: 252). Set at a budget of $400,000 (Fumento, 1980: 21), modest for the time, *42nd Street* rode on the back of the election campaign and set in motion a canon of Warner Brothers backstage films featuring many of the same cast and creatives. These included *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), *Footlight Parade* (1934), *Dames* (1934) and *Gold Diggers of 1935* (1935), which provided a catalogue of songs for the stage adaptation.

9.2 The 1980 Broadway Musical

The initial idea to adapt *42nd Street* into a stage musical came to fruition in August 1976. The troubled production period is discussed in depth in the writings of David Carter-Payne (1987) and John Anthony Gilvey (2005) which focus on the career of Champion, whilst evidence of the musical's gestation period can be viewed in the Michael Stewart papers at the New York Public Library at the Lincoln Center.

Outlining his interest in writing, the musical librettist Michael Stewart wrote two letters to producers of large regional and touring theatre operations. He suggests the ease of adapting an already well-known vehicle and borrowing the song catalogue of Harry Warren and Al Dubin from other Warner Brothers pictures. Acknowledging that he is trading on the nostalgia element, Stewart wrote:

> …but what the hell else is there on Broadway? It has three parts for decent names, and the best thing is that any names can play them. Any leading man from Joel Gray to Rock Hudson (that's quite a range) can play the Warner Baxter part. For the two girls you can get any Hollywood slightly-over-the-hill lady (Mitzi Gaynor, Eleanor Parker, and so on and so forth) for the Bebe Daniels part…
>
> (Aug 4th, 1976)[113]

It took a period of two years for the film rights to be obtained from United Artists and in August 1978 a one-year option to produce the musical was granted in an agreement between Stewart, his co-author Mark Bramble and director-choreographer Champion. Early drafts of the musical libretto, completed in August 1977, adhere very closely to the original film plot, with Stewart providing a list of dialogue from the original novel and film that should be included within the book[114].

[113] Michael Stewart Papers, Box 32, Folder 6, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library
[114] Michael Stewart Papers, Boxes 26-28, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

One significant deviation from the source material is to do with the character of Ann 'Anytime Annie' Reilly, portrayed on screen by Ginger Rogers. In early drafts, following the incapacitation of the star Dorothy Brock at the end of Act 1, Reilly puts herself forward to take over the leading role and was given the number 'By a Waterfall' as a try-out (1978)[115]. Following the number, Ann realises her shortcomings and sacrifices her chance to become the star by offering the opportunity to Peggy Sawyer. In the film, following Brock's accident, Reilly is seen flirting with the financial sponsor of the show, Abner Dillon, who puts her forward as the new star. Caught up in the moment, Reilly realises that she is not up to the job and tells the director '…I haven't got a chance of carryin' this show. I know that as well as you do, maybe better!' (Fumento, 1980: 171). One inconsistency in the film is that it is not clear why Reilly would give up this opportunity for Sawyer. Throughout several drafts from 1978 and 1979, this plot point remained intact and was suggested in the musical number 'By a Waterfall'. Written by Bramble and Stewart, the description indicates:

> Ann's performance is a mess, she can't manage the costume … or anything else. At one point the staging features Ann at the top of the staircase and she falls all the way down to the bottom step
> (First Draft, Aug 23 1978)[116]

at the completion of the number, the dialogue adheres very closely to that of the screenplay with Ann identifying Peggy as the natural successor to the role.

The original film contained five songs (see table 9.1 below for a list of musical numbers) which, as with most Berkeley musicals, were production numbers that were not relied upon to develop the narrative. 'It Must Be June' and 'You're Getting to be a Habit with Me' were both rehearsal numbers that happened on stage, whilst the remaining three gave the audience the spectacular numbers at the climax of the film. In order to create a more substantial score for the two-act

[115] Michael Stewart Papers, Box 26, Folder 2, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library
[116] Michael Stewart Papers, Boxes 26, Folder 2, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

musical, Bramble and Stewart relied on the song catalogues of Harry Warren and Al Dubin, particularly in relation to their work at Warner Brothers during the 1930s.

1933 Film	1980 Broadway Production	2001 Revival
It Must Be June You're Getting to be a Habit with Me Young and Healthy Shuffle off to Buffalo 42nd Street	**Act 1** Overture/Audition Young and Healthy Shadow Waltz Shadow Waltz (reprise) Go Into Your Dance You're Getting to be a Habit with Me Getting Out of Town Dames I Know Now I Know Now (reprise) We're in the Money Act One Finale **Act 2** Sunny Side to Every Situation Lullaby of Broadway About a Quarter to Nine Overture/Shuffle off to Buffalo 42nd Street 42nd Street (reprise)	**Act 1** Overture/Audition Young and Healthy Shadow Waltz Shadow Waltz (reprise) Go Into Your Dance You're Getting to be a Habit with Me Getting Out of Town Dames Keep Young and Beautiful Dames (reprise) I Only Have Eyes for You* I Only Have Eyes for You (reprise) We're in the Money (Boulevard of Broken Dreams**) Act One Finale **Act 2** Sunny Side to Every Situation Lullaby of Broadway About a Quarter to Nine Overture/With Plenty of Money and You Shuffle off to Buffalo 42nd Street 42nd Street (reprise) Encore *Would be inserted to replace I Know Now in subsequent productions after original production was staged in Australia in 1989. **Inserted in the 2017 London revival

Table 9.1: List of Musical Numbers in 42nd Street

Correspondence outlines song lists, and a letter dated April 17, 1979[117] to producer David Merrick, states that Stewart and Bramble have identified twelve spots within the script to place songs, some of which become integrated into the narrative and some which become production numbers of the show-within-a-show concept. Many of the original suggestions for songs remained the same throughout the drafts but were later changed, including numbers such as:

- 'Jeepers Creepers' as the initial duet between Billy and Peggy (later would become 'Young and Healthy'),
- 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' for a duet between Peggy and Dorothy (replaced with 'About a Quarter to Nine'),

[117] Michael Stewart Papers, Box 32, Folder 2, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

- 'Keep Young and Beautiful' as a powder puff ballet for Billy (replaced with 'Dames'),
- 'Lulu's Back in Town' (cut from the 1980 production during try-outs) as Peggy's featured number

The draft scripts and try-outs in Washington undoubtedly premiered musical numbers that would be cut or replaced with others, however *42nd Street* was staged on a tight timescale – unknown to the rest of the cast, Champion was slowly dying. As Carter-Payne notes in his study of Champion, there are elements of *42nd Street* that are unfinished due to the sudden death of the director (Carter-Payne, 1987: 449-475).

What emerges very clearly from the many outlines, letters and drafts of both scenes and the full musical is the 'faithfulness' to both the original novel and the resulting film adaptation. In the words of Hutcheon (2013) the 1933 adaptation is an 'acknowledged transposition' but the judicious edits of the various incarnations of the screenplay had stripped away many elements of the sub-plots that were unnecessary to the film production. The 1980, and later revivals, adaptation is much closer to the original film and does not add any additional characters that were featured in the novel. Stewart and Bramble's enthusiasm for the project is clearly outlined through correspondence dating back to the intial 1976 proposal of the project to various producers. In notes made during the rehearsal period in 1980, the authors presented a collection of lines taken either from the novel, film or original ideas, which suggests the awareness that both writers had in remaining faithful to the source material. The previous chapter outlined the core elements of musical theatre adaptation according to Lehman Engel, table 9.2 below aligns Engel's methodology with examples featured in the musical:

Engel's Core Components of Musical Comedy	Examples in *42nd Street*
Feeling	The 'heart' of *42nd Street* lies in the ultimate tribute to the very being of musical theatre. Giving the audience an exclusive pass to backstage, the trials and tribulations of show business are bared to all.
Subplot	Whilst the musical follows the journey of ingénue Peggy Sawyer, other sub-plots include the relationship between aging star Dorothy Brock and Pat Denning, Sawyer's relationships with Denning, juvenile lead Billy Lawlor and significantly with the director Julian Marsh.

Romance	Whilst romance is not central to the plot of *42nd Street*, it is the suggestion of it that provides allure. Sawyer and Marsh have several 'moments' throughout the musical but there is ambiguity as to where this may lead. The true romance overtly displayed is the character's love for performing through both song and dance – trivial – but nonetheless central to the success of the musical.
Lyrics and Particularization	Few musical numbers are tied into the diegesis of the narrative, most are self-referential and of the show-within-a-show mode. It is the performance numbers that set the tone and mood of the piece throughout.
Music	From the start of the overture the music is brash, uplifting and positive. Drawing upon the song catalogue of Harry Warren and Al Dubin, a familiarity with the music is established as the musical numbers are part of the American songbook.
Comedy	Comedy is very much at the heart of the musical, characters throw one-liners to the audience that demonstrate the innocent, yet innuendo driven, tone reflective of 1930s Hollywood. Comedic characters are presented with Ann 'Anytime Annie' Reilly, Bert Barry and Maggie Jones.

Table 9.2: Engel's core components as demonstrated in 42nd Street

Significantly, *42nd Street* drew upon a creative team that was well established in musical theatre. Producer David Merrick had supervised many successful Broadway productions, Stewart had written *Hello, Dolly!* and *Mack and Mabel* along with Champion who had received eight Tony Awards for his direction and choreography (tonywards.com). Unlike later adaptations, *42nd Street* was constructed by musical theatre pedigree that understood the form and the requirements of a successful production.

Whilst Bramble and Stewart honoured the original film in the stage adaptation, Champion's choreography deviated considerably from recreating anything from the Berkeley on-screen renderings. What Berkeley captured on camera would not transpose to a live theatre, in Berkeley's choreography the camera is the dancer and guides the audience to the required view point. In theatre, audiences are static and Champion took full advantage of utilising the dancers within the space. Champion's work pays tribute to his predecessor but ultimately, in alignment with Mideglow's (2007) outline of reconstructing dance discussed in the previous chapter, 're-works' the material to create a strong body of work that is now recognised and revered in its own right and is not associated with the 1933 film. The opening number, initiated by a slightly raised curtain and a view of 30 plus pairs of feet in multi-coloured tap shoes, has remained an iconic part of musical theatre choreography. Remaining faithful to the screenplay, and utilising the Warren/Dubin catalogue, seemed logical because of the strong association

both elements have with the material. However, within the confines of the traditional proscenium arch theatre, Champion was almost given carte blanch to create musical numbers that captured the essence and style of the period, yet first and foremost were realistic to a theatrical setting in terms of being framed by the traditional proscenium arch. This juncture is one of the flaws of the film – the musical numbers were far more elaborate than could ever be featured on stage, however on film they offer more visual spectacle to the audience. From the end of the overture through to the eventual debut of Peggy Sawyer as the star of the show-within-show, Champion fashioned a cavalcade of musical numbers that showcased the large chorus of dancers and featured principals. Tap, as appropriate to the era of the musical, was the predominant dance style employed in four of the main musical numbers, whilst the others reflected musical comedy dancing of the 1930s. Unlike Berkeley, Champion was a seasoned dancer, however tap was not one of the main elements of his previous work, particularly in his screen appearances with his wife Marge. Champion engaged two assistants who specialised in tap, Randy Skinner and Karin Baker, who worked for two months in pre-production with Champion prior to starting rehearsals. Although he and Marge had tap danced in their film appearances, it was not a dance style utilised within their vocabulary, unlike their on-screen predecessors Astaire and Rogers. Baker acknowledges that a basic knowledge of tap was present in Champion's work but it was not sufficiently developed for a musical that predominantly employed the genre. During the developmental process, Champion and his assistants developed a unique working relationship in which the rhythms of the choreography would be given by Champion and Baker and Skinner would then match the feet to the given beats. Baker states:

> it was the strangest way of working. He'd say 'I need something here', and he would give you the rhythm. In the 42nd Street ballet, he would take one rhythm and would put it against another rhythm. He loved doing that and got so excited about it and all of the characters had rhythms assigned to them.
>
> (Baker, 2016)

The title song became the showcase on which Peggy's success as the star of the fictional *Pretty Lady* hinges upon. In the rehearsal draft dated May 6th 1980, the outline of the number reads as:

> A production number featuring Peggy and Full Company. Billy and Soldiers strike up acquaintanceship with Peggy and Girls. They are attracted to each other, at once point they dance together. Through this a Pickpocket has stolen a necklace from an Elegant Lady. She screams, Cops arrive, they chase Pickpocket, shots are fires and Billy is hit. He falls, and as we hear ambulance's siren, we realize he is dead. Peggy is in a state of shock as the body is carried off, then slowly, but surely the pulse of life comes back to the street, and despite her feelings, Peggy joins the entire company as neon lights outlining the entire set – signs, theatres, skyscrapers, etc. bleed through the scrim which rises as Peggy and company dance to grand finale.
>
> (Stewart and Bramble, 1980)[118]

The outline presented above is far more detailed than in the licensed version of the libretto available to production companies which simplifies the ending to state:

> …the girl, caught up in the rhythm, dances frantically with them [the company] as the Ballet ends.
>
> (Stewart and Bramble, 1986: 2-7-27 [Libretto])

What is so unique about the ballet is that Champion fashioned a number that, for the first time in musical theatre, was an extended narrative piece of dance primarily utilising the tap vocabulary. *On Your Toes* (1936) utilised tap in the 'Slaughter on Tenth Avenue' ballet, however only lead dancer Ray Bolger who was a speciality tap and eccentric dancer, used this style of dance in the number. In *42nd Street* the entire company of dancers was in tap shoes, displaying an array of stereotyped caricatures that represents the hustle and bustle of New York. The people described in the lyrics of the title song are given life – 'Nifties' are the young girls that dance with the soldiers, 'Sexy Ladies' are represented by a group of girls who dance more suggestively and the 'Elite' demonstrated the sophistication of the Astaire and Rogers films of the 1930s. In the final version of the number the stage is stark, lit only by neon-signs that

[118] Michael Stewart Papers, Boxes 28, Box 2, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

provide names of productions and actors appearing in Times Square. Baker observes that whilst Champion's style of movement is not as identifiable as that of another contemporary, Fosse, Champion has a fascination with the use of space and 'loved to have the freedom to move through the space. He had that balletic style that was very free and you felt like you were really moving' (Baker, 2016). Baker's observation reflects an identifiable motif that is evident in his film dances with Marge and throughout his stage work. There are several numbers in *42nd Street* that utilise the expanse of the stage and have a noticeable freedom of movement; significantly 'Go into Your Dance', 'Getting Out of Town', 'Dames' and the '42nd Street Ballet'. Whilst the first three musical numbers transport the audience between differing locations, the choreography and movement utilise both the horizontal and vertical planes of the stage space. This is not to say that other choreographers do not engage with this, but the tap vocabulary lends itself to be more static and during certain phrases, and or steps, can remain on the spot. Much like the work of Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain's* 'Broadway Rhythm', Champion utilises the idioms of jazz movement and incorporates tap steps that travel and move through the space to give a sense of continual motion. Only the opening number of *42nd Street*, which is set at an audition, is predominately static due to the repetitive nature of the steps, however it still contains segments of movement that see the large ensemble move in unison precision.

The eight minute ballet, set as a production number, demonstrates a significant utilisation of the stage and movement from the dancers. Whilst the ensemble represents various street characters in New York, Peggy and Billy, along with two other couples, are the focal point for much of the number and were given choreography that articulated counter-rhythms with each other and the chorus and infused a jazz dance quality to the movement. The earthiness and use of *plié* within the choreography facilitated the opportunity to travel within the space and developed the relationship between the characters with greater intensity. The number begins with Peggy framed in a spotlight behind a scrim featuring the show-within-a-show logo of the fictional *Pretty Lady* production. Two policemen enter and survey the audience before exiting, a thief enters

and creeps across the stage, he extends his leg out to the side into a deep lunge, he slowly lifts arms extending out to a curtain which rises to reveal the full stage. The thief is dressed in all black, with red gloves and cap that echoes a costume worn by Champion in the film *Lovely to Look At*. As Peggy begins the song, the ensemble enters group by group to the pulsating drive of the orchestration. The ensemble resembles an array of characters; Policemen, Soldiers, Young girls, Bellboys, Prostitutes, Society folk, Gangsters and their molls. All the different groups are mirrored on each side of the stage and provided an assortment of colours, along with different rhythmic patterns.

Figure 9.1: The 42nd Street Ballet from the 1989 UK Tour

Whilst Peggy sings the chorus of '42nd Street', the cast remain motionless only moving on the pulse beats, which appear between the musical phrases of the lyrics, in their associated groups. During the middle bridge of the song the ensemble begin to move in the space in different combinations of steps, suggesting the constant motion of the streets of New York. After the song concludes Peggy joins two other women who draw the attention of the three soldiers (one played by Billy). They form three duets and begin to dance together in the space as the ensemble gradually leave the stage. The dancers perform together in unison playing against the natural rhythm of the music to create a syncopated trill of tap sounds. As the intensity of the tap steps

increase the ensemble re-enter so that the stage is once again covered (see *figure 9.1*) with movement and energy. Peggy and Billy find themselves at either side of the stage and enter a call-and-response combination of quick-fire *shuffle pick-up changes* and turning steps. They eventually come together centre stage as the musical accompaniment diminishes allowing Billy and Peggy to enter a *pas de deux,* using the rhythms of the tap steps to communicate with one another in a seductive duologue. During the rehearsal process dancer Reams stated that Champion created every moment of the ballet, 'none of my steps were in that number. That conversation in taps was just brilliant, and we knew basically what we were saying to each other' (Reams, 2015). It is one of the rare moments that two dancers engage in a sensuous *pas de deux*, forgoing the use of any instrumentation, and playing with the sound and intonation of the steel taps to give the allusion of a growing relationship. Baker also acknowledged Champion's contribution to this section and comments that:

> He [Champion] loved the idea of having a conversation of tap, with the sounds. He said at this point in the ballet we are going to have some rubato movement – it meant that the music is not going to connect with every beat and it was a conversation. He said as this this point the clarinet will go 'da-da-da' and the movement will connect.
>
> (2016)

Up to 1980 there was no other musical film or stage production that utilised the tap vocabulary and rhythms to act as a mating ritual between two characters. Whilst the a-cappella section is scattered with the rhythms and builds in intensity, as the clarinet and piano occupy the instrumentation, the two dancers become one and dance in unison using jazz and tap dance vocabularies. Peggy and Billy have now united in their relationship and their dance becomes celebratory, intermingling amongst the ensemble, although always at the forefront of the stage. The number ends with Billy being shot by a thief and Peggy being lost in the madness of the eschewing chaos. As the music accelerates, line by line the dancers pick up Peggy into their movement until she fully embraces the fervent madness of the busy street, accepting that life goes on.

The Berkeley film version creates Times Square on stage, Ruby Keeler dancing on top of a taxi and crime and chaos in the street. The number climaxes with an endless ensemble holding boarded skyscrapers which, when mounted on a staircase, creates a seemingly continual metropolis that fills the screen ending with a close-up shot of Keeler and singer Dick Powell at the top of the buildings. The number is a visual spectacle but provides no real narrative and the suggestion of Keeler and Powell as a couple (within this on-stage musical number) has not been developed until this point and seems out of place. The tap ballet provided an entirely original musical number that made no attempt to associate itself with its film partner. As a narrative device, it provided the audience with the raison d'être for pushing the character of Peggy to replace the injured star Dorothy Brock. Unlike the film, which up until the brief tap dance on top of the New York taxi car, made no attempt to justify support for Keeler's portrayal of Peggy as a leading character. By the climax of the stage number, the audience is left with little doubt as to the talents of Peggy, although from the first introduction of the character, her talent as a dancer and singer is part of the narrative. As a final contribution to Broadway dance, Champion fashioned a production number that elevated tap dance beyond the feeling of joy and exuberance that it has been associated with during the MGM films of Astaire and Kelly. Whilst Kelly often incorporated its vocabulary into his on-screen ballets, he utilised the ballet and jazz dance vocabularies for the more serious acts of courtship and mating rituals that often-frequent Kelly's work. Here, Champion believed enough in the genre to utilise it fully to engage with the portrayal of characters and their relationships throughout. Still as of 2017, there has been no further attempt within a musical to present a tap ballet. Only choreographer Susan Stroman, particularly in her 1992 musical *Crazy for You,* has sought to engage extensively with the tap genre.

9.3 The 2001 Revival

The 2001 revival was inspired by a Dutch production, which was produced by Joop van den Ende in the summer of 2000. For this staging choreographer Randy Skinner and original co-author Mark Bramble, who was also directing the production, were given the opportunity to make substantial changes before bringing a new production to Broadway. In this new revival, 'Keep Young and Beautiful' was added as a transition number between the 'Dames' rehearsal sequence for the characters of Bert and Maggie to sing, who previously had received little in terms of a 'specialty' number in the production. This replaced the elaborate mirrored carousel that featured the chorus girls in a ballet sequence, set in a gymnasium in the original 1980 production. Whilst Champion's original staging paid homage to the endless stream of platinum blondes featured in Berkeley's camera lens, it did not attempt to recreate the kaleidoscopic patterns that were synonymous with the film director. The insertion of this new number allowed Skinner to fulfil the request for a Berkeley-esque number, presenting a revolving stage in which the female ensemble lay down in a circular formation to execute precise leg and arm movements as they are rotated on the platform. Skinner also wanted to provide audiences with a greater sense of 1930s cinema, he was particularly keen to present the slightly racier edge of the pre-code Hollywood films, Skinner stated:

> With 'Young and Beautiful' I wanted to bring in more truthfulness pre-Hollywood code. That was a choice that was not made in 1980. It was very pristine looking with the girls and was very wholesome... I said if we are going to do the revival in 2001, times are very different and we should be truer to the period and show more skin.
>
> (2013)

A large mirror was flown in and angled towards the girls to give the kaleidoscopic overhead shot that could be seen by audiences in all seats of the theatre. (see *figure 9.2*).

Figure 9.2: The Berkeley overhead shot (from Author's own personal collection)

The inclusion of 'With Plenty of Money and You' provided a much-needed plot point in terms of Peggy rising from the chorus to become the star of the show, which in the 1980 production was shown only in the '42nd Street' ballet. The added song featured Peggy tap dancing on top of two white grand pianos then joining the male ensemble into a large group tap number. It is reminiscent of the early appearances of film dancer Eleanor Powell and at last provides the opportunity for audiences to see Peggy as the 'star' that everyone in the company assured she would be. Throughout the many early script drafts a production number for Peggy was always intended – most versions propose the song 'Lulu's Back in Town' as a number for the male ensemble, dressed in tuxedos and set against a New York skyline. The description indicates that Peggy arrives in a limousine before executing a dance with the male dancers (1980)[119].

[119] Michael Stewart Papers, Boxes 26 Folder 5, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

For the revival, the producer told Skinner that he wanted the finale to have a much bigger ending featuring an expanding staircase with chasing lights on each level. As the staircase expanded, the audience first hear marching tap dancers who, line by line, appear at the top and cascade down the stair case singing the verse of the title number that was sung by Powell in the original film. Another character in the ballet is killed, allowing Peggy and Billy to celebrate that life goes on, which for Skinner gave him the 'big MGM finish' that ties in with the extravagant musical numbers of the period and the evolution of dance on film that began during this experimental period (see *figure* 9.3). The idea of revealing a huge staircase on stage at the climax of the number stems back to the first draft of the script completed February 5th, 1980[120] which suggests that a gunman, and not Billy, is killed and a 'huge staircase covering the entire stage rises' in which the ensemble dance down and across. The use of the staircase is reminiscent of the ending of the film version of the number, which sees the dancers climb up the stairs before turning to face the camera holding cut-outs of skyscrapers which gradually consume the dancers in the space.

Figure 9.3: The conclusion of the finale '42nd Street Ballet' (from author's own personal collection)

[120] Michael Stewart Papers, Boxes 26, Folder 5, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

Much of the choreography in the revival for the ballet remains either complete or with small revisions, the soldiers are replaced by Sailors and the costume designs are significantly different. In the section immediately following the *a cappella* tap duet between Peggy and Billy there is a greater incorporation of lifts, and the two dancers remain inseparable as the thief is shot dead by one of the gangsters. Following this incident, the stage is cleared leaving Peggy in shock and Billy comforting her. The music is subdued and Billy sings lyrics that appeared in the film sung by his on-screen counterpart, Dick Powell. At the conclusion of Billy's song, the orchestra vamps as a large staircase expands from the back of the stage to at least three quarters of the way downstage. Line by line the ensemble dancers, all dressed in white and gold costumes, cascade down the staircase as each step is illuminated by bright yellow bulbs. The ensemble repeats the lyrics of the previous song section as Peggy once again allows herself to get caught up in the rhythm of the city. Billy and Peggy run to midway up the stairs and join in the tap section with the ensemble. The cast dance in military precision before descending the stairs closer to the audience, there is a halt in the music and the orchestra *tacet* for twenty bars. During this silence, the ensemble run back up the staircase and showcase the rhythmic patterns drilled into them by Skinner and his assistants. It is an electrifying moment in the number to hear over 40 dancers tap in unison which resonates throughout the entire theatre. As the intensity of the rhythms builds, the dancers stop and the drums explode, signalling the orchestra to once again join the dancers in the climax of the song. The lights on the staircase shimmer in canon as each level of dancers on the staircase build their movement line by line, meanwhile Peggy and Billy run downstage and end the number centre stage in a spotlight.

Although paying homage to Champion's original staging and choreography, Skinner utilised the advancements in technology in theatre and presented a revival that has paid tribute to the bright technicolour pallets of the studio system musicals. The 1980 production was darker in its tone reflecting the more turbulent scenes in Times Square outside of the doors of the Winter Garden theatre. Skinner recalled seeing the 1983 Broadway revival of the Jerry Herman

musical *Mame*, in which its original leading lady Angela Lansbury returned. Having seen the original 1966 production as a child Skinner felt:

> … they cranked everything out and it was the exact replica. I sat there and thought this can't be the show I saw as a kid… it seems so flat and small. Then when Ann Reinking did Chicago in 1997 and paid homage to Bob [Fosse], she kind of did a new treatment of it, and I thought this is what you need to do… it doesn't hold up to the memory of when you first saw it.
>
> (2013)

In pre-production for the 2001 revival Skinner felt that there were certain numbers that did not need to be touched, such as 'We're in the Money', 'Shadow Waltz' and 'Lullaby of Broadway', but other elements should be on a far grander scale. Influenced by dancers from the golden age of film musicals Skinner drew upon his knowledge and understanding of the period in which the original film was set. He also does not believe that there are multiple styles of dance, suggesting that:

> Yeah, we're tapping, but think of it as a ballroom moment. Or we're tapping, but think of it as a 50s jazz number… because I do think a lot of people think of it as two things: you're jazz dancing, or you're tapping… it's all one art form.
>
> (Skinner cited in Durjee, 2017)

From understanding the style of Champion and his approach to creating the dances in *42nd Street,* with a limited tap vocabulary, it is permissible that this fluid integration of different genres of dance is a legacy retained from the original work. Reminiscent of Astaire, Kelly and Eleanor Powell, tap was never a stationary form of dance where the sole focus was on the feet; the entire body moved as did the trajectory of the movement however, unlike other forms of dance, the audience is given an auditory experience in addition to a visual one. Skinner has been the preserver of the *42nd Street* legacy since its original creation and has therefore carefully honoured the memory of Champion without fully erasing it from this new production. There seems a clear understanding in Skinner's methodology that to bring a revival to stage, there are certain elements of a production that need revisiting. In April 2017, this revised version of the musical opened at London's Theatre Royal Drury Lane, the home of the original

1984 London production. Appearing 16 years after the Broadway revival, Skinner and Bramble have continued to play with the musical by adding additional material. The ageing diva Dorothy Brock is given a new song in Act 1, 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' which allows the audience to see the character in a full on-stage performance before she is injured at the conclusion of the act. There are also some minor changes to some of the tap vocabulary in the opening number of the musical.

In terms of authorship *42nd Street* is one of the most convoluted of all film-to-stage adaptations. Not only is the original director of the film an established cinematic auteur whose visual landscapes on film are synonymous with the Hollywood musical, but Berkeley's contributions to the film elevated the genre of the backstage musical to the forefront of musical films throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Similarly, Champion was a significant creative force in the musical theatre canon of the 1950s joining the ranks of other director/choreographers whose control over the material elevated the status of dance in musicals as seen in the work of Robbins, Champion and Fosse. Champion had several advantages, Berkeley was first and foremost a dance director who did not dance so there is not the issue of recreating a discernible dance style as in the work of Astaire or Kelly. Translating the film to a theatre environment eradicates some of the cinematic illusions created by Berkeley as they are not achievable, due to the editing and close-up shots, within the confines of the proscenium arch. Instead, Champion fashioned a musical that captured the essence of the Berkeley musicals; backstage stories, Dubin and Warren songs and large ensembles of dancers on stage. Champion's musical numbers never stay static, they move not only through the space but also with a cinematic effect of transporting the audience from one location to another seamlessly. Whilst the final production created an original identity by the way of the movement style and use of tap vocabulary, pre-production drafts suggest that there were greater influences from Berkeley film musicals such as incorporating a waterfall (as in 'By A Waterfall' from *Footlight Parade* (1933)) and the large staircases eventually

incorporated into the revival (utilised in 'Lullaby of Broadway' from *Gold Diggers of 1935* (1935)).

Baker remembers during rehearsals that Champion's original idea for the number 'We're in the Money' was to have the chorus girls dancing under over-sized top hats, however upon trying out choreography in such enormous attire caused more hilarity than creativity and the idea was dropped. The number as performed on stage in the current production was created within a lunch break (Baker, 2016). The use of the over-sized coins that are danced upon throughout the number are reminiscent of the Berkeley staging in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. It is through this nod to the work of Berkeley that Champion distanced himself enough from the memory of the original to create a musical number that is iconic within its own right. This aligns well with the ideas of Suvin, discussed in the previous chapter, who suggests that adaptations contain only traces of their original intention, yet offer something new to the audience. First and foremost a dancer, Champion offered something that Berkeley's work did not: a production full of exuberant dance numbers that required an ensemble of trained dancers who went beyond Berkeley's spectacle. Rubin acknowledges Berkeley was consistent in his use of spectacle throughout his career (1993: 76) more so than the content of the dance routines themselves. Looking at the title number from the 1934 film *Dames*, a knowledgeable eye can recognise that the synchronization of the tap sounds and the footwork is not together. This observation is not to discredit Berkeley in any way, but suggests that Champion's work has survived past the 1980 production due his dance and choreographic ability. Champion's authorship is clearly entwined throughout the entire musical because of both his directorial and choreographic choices. Theatre critic for the *New York* Times, Frank Rich states:

> He [Gower Champion] was no innovator, like Jerome Robbins or Michael Bennett. He never created his own distinctive choreographic style, like Bob Fosse. He didn't try to tackle daring subjects, like Hal Prince. And yet Mr. Champion's body of work is as much as part of the history of the contemporary musical as that of his talented peers.
>
> (Rich, 1980)

However, Rich's assessment seems harsh, particularly in consideration that both *Hello, Dolly!* and *42nd Street* share the distinction of being in the lists of the longest running musicals on Broadway. In addition, Champion had experience in film that neither Robbins or Bennett had prior to their careers as theatre choreographers. Whilst Rich's review of the opening night of *42nd Street* criticises the book stating 'nonetheless, the gritty slambang rhythm that gave the movie its charm is almost completely lost' (Rich, 1980), he continues to praise the choreography as a tribute that celebrates all of Champion's prior achievements. There is a not a moment in the onstage action that cannot be traced back to a prior Champion production. The strength of such authorship also suggests why Skinner incorporated several numbers intact, seemingly there was no need to change choreography for the sake of it. Of the new numbers, what is clear is that these are all in the style and vein of Champion and continue to salute his need for movement in the space.

Both before and after the 1980 premiere, 42nd Street has proved itself to be a worthy stage adaptation, but what makes *42nd Street* that exception? It fulfils the elements outlined by Engel in abundance, it does not rely on celebrity casting, although many established musical theatre performers have played the leading roles through its various productions. Part of the success of this musical adaptation should be attributed to the creative talents involved in its development process, Champion, Stewart and Bramble, and producer Merrick have a long lineage in musical theatre and it is the combination of these talents that created a template for the adaptive process - fundamentally they understood musical comedy and the needs of the audience. The source also lends itself to a successful musical comedy, the only expansion of the material was in the addition of more musical numbers, which receive the most recognition and celebration because of the dance content above any other element.

As in the earlier backstage Broadway musical, *A Chorus Line* (1975), *42nd Street* tells a somewhat cautionary tale, yet also celebrates the dream of creating and starring in a Broadway musical.

At its core the musical speaks to anyone who has ever appeared in, created or simply enjoyed the innocence of musical comedy. Many other adaptations that followed either tried to faithfully recreate iconic moments from the screen, or try new concepts in the adaptive process which do not always successfully recreate the material for a new audience. *42nd Street* is not so identified with one single talent, other than the camerawork of Berkeley. The musical embraces an ensemble company that provide the entertainment, the only cast that takes centre stage is Peggy, and the audience have rooted for her to rise from the chorus. *42nd Street*'s adaptors expanded upon, but never took away from the essence of the musical.

One of the musical's most poignant lines is in a small scene towards the end of Act 1 in which director Julian Marsh makes fun of ingénue Peggy's excitement at appearing in the chorus. The naïve Sawyer responds with:

> … put all those specks together, you have something alive and beautiful that can reach out to a thousand people we've never seen before.
>
> (Stewart and Bramble, 1980: 37-38)

For someone who has appeared in that very chorus and experienced the adulation and response from audiences, *42nd Street* continues to reach out to its audience and transport them to the world of old fashioned musical comedy. In reviewing the 2017 London revival for *The Stage* newspaper, critic Tim Bano observes:

> Opulence and escapism meet Depression-era America head on, a reminder that the 1933 film's colossal success was due in no small part to the feel-good and consequence-free lavishness it offered in contrast to the poverty of its audience's lives.
>
> (2017)

Whatever the year, *42nd Street* continues to do what the golden age of film musicals offered; by providing two and half hours of unadulterated escapism in which audiences can immerse themselves guilt free.

Chapter 10: Make 'Em Laugh: Singin' In the Rain on stage

Unlike *42nd Street,* whose narrative concerned the mechanics of producing a Broadway musical, *Singin' in the Rain* found its humour as a pastiche of 1920's Hollywood during the changeover from silent to sound pictures. This chapter will explore the complex history of the screen-to-stage-adaptation of *Singin' in the Rain* that has had two separate productions both in the UK and the USA that differ significantly in choreographic content and construction.

Based on the 1952 MGM film musical, *Singin' in the Rain* was the genesis of producer Freed. Engaging experienced Broadway writers Betty Comden and Adolph Green in the summer of 1950, the musical was to incorporate the song catalogue of Freed and his partner Nacio Herb Brown, whose music featured in many of the film musicals of the 1920s and 1930s. Inspired by the music, Comden and Green established the scenario of the transition amongst the studios of new sound technology, influenced by the story of actor John Gilbert, whose career failed to maintain momentum during the introduction to all-talking pictures (Hess and Dabholkar, 2009: 1-25) (Comden and Green, 1986: iii). The film starred Kelly as Don Lockwood, O'Connor as Cosmo Brown, Reynolds as Kathy Selden and Jean Hagen as Lina Lamont. It was directed and choreographed by Kelly and Donen and was their third collaboration together.

As of 2017, *Singin' in the Rain* is rated by the American Film Institute as the number one greatest movie musical of all time and number five in the greatest American films of all time (afi.com). Its adaptation to stage, at first glance, is an unusual choice for stage material – central to its plot is the film-making business – something Broadway musicals had only experimented with fleetingly. Comden and Green had previously written the 1964 musical *Fade Out, Fade In* for comedian Carol Burnett which ran for less than one year, and Jerry Herman's *Mack and Mabel* (1974) sustained an audience for only six weeks. By the early 1980s, *Singin' in the Rain* had

not achieved the status it maintains in the 21st century and its three leading actors were still active and working professionally in theatre, television and film.

10.1 The 1952 Film

In surveying the relationship between choreography and the camera, film scholar Casey Charness acknowledges that *Singin' in the Rain* is a 'thoroughly American picture, and dance is a vivid and pertinent part of the film's screen identity' (1977: 97). Charness praises the film for its uniqueness in integrating almost a third of the running time as dance movement, offering much diversity in the Kelly and Donen choreography. Whilst the dance in the film of *42nd Street* was purely cinematic; the narrative centred around the creation of a Broadway musical. In *Singin' in the Rain* both the story and the dances were envisaged for the camera so its adaptation to a stage musical is a difficult undertaking as nothing, beyond its popularity, suggests that it is ripe for transferring to the medium of live theatre. Comden and Green brought a theatrical flair to the script written to accommodate the songs of Freed and Brown, thus allowing a seamless integration of dance and music. Fundamentally, *Singin' in the Rain* is an innocent pastiche of Hollywood's silent era making the change to sound films, something only perhaps Hollywood could really spoof. Delamater observes that Kelly paid homage to the early film industry citing his nod to Charlie Chaplin in the title number, using an umbrella in place of a cane and his tribute to Berkeley in the musical montage sequence. Dyer acknowledged how some musicals that contain show-within-show (or film-within-film) frameworks often lend themselves more towards parody, yet *Singin' in the Rain* as a musical film surveys the making of a film musical: 'The Dancing Cavalier'. Whilst the style of acting within the film-within-film sequences may parody the actors of the late 1920's, the film does not tend to parody the genre, it 'imitates' it (Dyer, 2007: 1, 81-82). As a film musical, it encapsulates the technical elements available at the time, yet it is also constructed by a creative team who understand the composition of a musical for film. Comden and Green were experienced writers having worked on the 1944 dance musical

On the Town and its later adaptation to film demonstrating an understanding of the integration between dance and narrative.

Whilst *42nd Street* was first and foremost theatrical in its subject, Table 10.1 below examines the film through the lens of Engel's components of musical comedy in theatre to establish whether it contains the elements he requires for a successful stage musical:

Engel's Core Components of Musical Comedy	Examples in *Singin' in the Rain* (Film)
Feeling	The film is an affectionate spoof of the early age of Hollywood and gives the audiences an inside look into how film studios transitioned from silent to sound films.
Subplot	Whilst the central plot of the film focuses on old Hollywood and making talking pictures the film also concerns the romance between Don Lockwood and ingénue Kathy Selden. The story also spoofs the workings of the studio and star system throughout the story.
Romance	Romance is central to the plot of *Singin' In the Rain* as it focuses on the blossoming affair between the Kelly and Reynolds characters. Dance is used as a device to explore the relationship and furthers the romance between the two leads.
Lyrics and Particularization	Whilst many of the songs were written long before the film narrative was completed, as a self-reflexive entity the lyrics are often commenting on, or parodying, the situation. Freed and Brown's career was a significant part of the early sound era and therefore the songs situate well within the time period. The lyrics, such 'Good Morning, Good Morning, Sunbeams will soon shine through' are particular to the situation within the plot and promote the optimistic energy of the characters.
Music	The music is affectionately of the period, and even the newly composed songs such as 'Make 'Em Laugh' are within keeping to the setting. Throughout the film, music and dance work in tandem with one another and are central to the setting of the dance numbers.
Comedy	As a pastiche, the film is dependent on humour throughout its narrative. Comedy is delivered through the characters of Cosmo Brown and Lina Lamont, played by O'Connor and Hagen respectively. 'Make 'Em Laugh', performed by O'Connor, is a tour de force in physical comedy. The dialogue has one-liners placed throughout, sometimes subtle, sometimes less so. The dance also contributes to the comedy, in part because of the talents of the performers in action.

Table 10.1: Engel's Components of Musical Theatre in Singin' in the Rain

The idea for a stage adaptation was started in 1981 by producers Maurice and Lois F. Rosenfield who acquired the worldwide rights to *Singin' in the Rain*. In a partnership with British theatrical impresario Harold Fielding, the original stage adaptation first opened in London in 1983 at the London Palladium. It featured British singer Tommy Steele in the leading role of Don Lockwood and Steele directed the show alongside Wendy Toye. Roy Castle, Danielle Carson and Sarah Payne fulfilled the other roles respectively and American choreographer Peter Gennaro staged the dance and musical numbers. The British production opened on June

30th 1983 and played 894 performances until September 1985 (musicalheaven.co.uk). The production subsequently toured the UK, Japan, and returned for a limited run at the London Palladium in 1989. In an article appearing in *Variety*, the Rosenfields chose London as the city to try-out the musical due to the significantly reduced production costs ($1.75 million compared to $4 million in New York) and to escape the memory of actor and director Kelly (Hummler, 1985). The Broadway production, opening on July 2nd 1985 and running for a total of 367 performances closing on May 18th 1986, engaged an alternative creative team helmed by director and choreographer Twyla Tharp. In complete contrast to *42nd Street*, the British adaptation proved more sustainable and was performed for over six years and subsequently revived for a UK tour in the 1994-1995 season, unlike its Broadway counterpart which played less than a year of performances and toured the US in 1986. It is the 1986 touring version that is now licensed for amateur and professional productions, which has been performed twice in London's West End in 2004 and 2012.

10.2 The 1983 London Production

The original London production stayed very close to the original screenplay and the plotting of musical numbers hued very closely to the running order of the film (see table 10.2 for a comparison between adaptations). Whilst Comden and Green receive credit for the screenplay, reports in *Variety* suggest that they were not responsible for the adaptation of this production and only came on-board after watching the musical in London (Hummler, 1985). It is suggested in the programme and souvenir brochure of the London production and subsequent tours that Steele was involved in working the screenplay into the stage adaptation. During the adaptation process, several key songs from the film were subject to copyright restrictions and were unavailable. These were substituted with songs from other composers that were written in the period/style of the original film musical (Robinson,1995). John Yap, record producer for

JAY Records which specialises in cast recordings of musical productions, confirmed via email that his label turned down the opportunity to record the production due to the substitutions in songs from the original film. The substitutions included:

Song in 1952 film	Replacement for 1983 London Production
Make 'Em Laugh	*Be a Clown*
Beautiful Girl	*Too Marvellous For Words* (later replaced with *You Stepped out of a Dream)*
You Were Meant for Me	*You Are My Lucky Star (already in the film)*
All I Do is Dream of You	*I Can't Give You Anything but Love*
Broadway Rhythm	*Fascinating Rhythm*

Table 10.2: Songs substituted for the 1983 London Production

During the London run and later productions the substitutions were later replaced with the original songs from the film, presumably due to the renegotiations in the contract with the music publishers. In a memo dated November 6th 1984, US producer Rosenfield indicated to the Broadway creative team that whilst they had gained access to the catalogue of songs by Freed and Brown from CBS, there was some restriction. The contract states:

1. Such of the following compostions as may be designated by Maurice Rosenfield, from time to time:
    a) Singin' in the Rain
    b) Moses
    c) Good Morning
    d) I've Got a Feelin' You're Foolin'
    e) Wedding of the Painted Doll
    f) Should I
    g) Would You
    h) You Were Meant For Me.

2. Plus up to four of the following compositions as may be designated by Maurice Rosenfield, from time to time:
    a) You Are My Lucky Star
    b) Fit As A Fiddle
    c) Temptation
    d) All I Do is Dream of You
    e) Make 'Em Laugh
    f) Beautiful Girl
    g) Broadway Melody

h) Broadway Rhythm

(Rosenfield, 1984)[121]

The restriction on this list highlights the difficulty in obtaining the rights to the music during the initial creative period as with over ten songs on both lists appearing in the film, at no point could the producers secure all the songs that were heard on the original film soundtrack, so had no choice but to deviate. In an interview theatre critic Steven Suskin, who was also the company manager on the Broadway production, has suggested that this was not the case and song choices were made exclusively by Tharp, however he was not party to the London or Broadway pre-production periods so may not have been privy to this information (Suskin, 2017). It appears that the restrictive list of musical numbers was eventually relaxed as all songs now appearing in the licensed version of the musical were in the film.

For this adaptation, Gennaro was engaged to create the dance and musical numbers. As a dancer Gennaro appeared in several musicals including being one of the original trio in Bob Fosse's 'Steam Heat' from *The Pajama Game* (1954). As a choreographer he staged several Broadway musicals and the 1964 MGM film adaptation of *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* with Reynolds (Billman, 1997: 332-335). Stylistically Gennaro's choreography was energetic and was best served by strong technical dancers. For *Singin' in the Rain* five of the numbers were recreations of the original Kelly and Donen film choreography: 'Fit As a Fiddle', 'Moses Supposes', 'Singin' in the Rain' 'You Are My Lucky Star' and 'Good Morning'. Due to the song 'You Were Meant for Me' being unavailable, 'You are My Lucky Star was used as a replacement, yet the choreography is based upon the former number set to a different orchestral arrangement. The remaining five numbers gave Gennaro some freedom to create original choreography to songs that were not associated with the original film musical. No video footage appears to exist from the London production, so it is impossible to make any comparison

[121] Comden and Green Papers, Box 18, Folder 12, Billy Rose Theater Division, The New York Public Library

between the original film and the recreated staging. However, 'Fascinating Rhythm', which replaced the 'Broadway Rhythm' ballet was performed by Tommy Steele in a 1995 television special and remains the only readily available visual evidence of the work created by Gennaro. What this number presents is a much scaled down production number featuring Steele singing the song solo before a chorus of tap dancers enter to frame him. The orchestration builds in intensity which creates some dynamic progression in the number, yet it is stark in contrast to the ballet created by Kelly solely for the camera.

The number begins with Steele in a spotlight singing the verse and first bridge of the chorus. The orchestration is sparse and only gradually builds through the first bridge of the song, as Steele sings the word 'fliver', the piano hits a driving rhythm and the reed instruments gradual join. On the word 'rhythm', Steele extends his arm out to the back of the stage and exits. Echoing the pulse beats of the piano, sounds of tap dancer's feet begin to fill the theatre and a dark panel of light appears at the back of the stage in which legs are revealed. For 20 bars in the music, the dancers execute a series of *tap step ball changes*, later interspersed with *scuffs*, that slowly drive the movement forward as more panels of light slowly open on the floor of the stage. Towards the end of this sequence the dancer's legs move to the back of the stage in a sudden sweep, the intensity in the music builds as the dancers travel forwards in a series of *ball changes* to a new formation. With a bright blare in the music the lights come up to reveal the ensemble in ankle length fringe dresses and the men dressed in dapper waistcoats with glittering beading. The choreography echoes the precision lines of the 1920s and 1930s and features a series of steps with sharp arm movements that are all in sync with one another.

As a group, they move to the right diagonal front corner of the stage to form two diagonal lines, women in front and slowly move as a group across the front of the stage to make two straight lines. Another series of precision line dance ensues with the men and women rotating through their lines. There are strong stabs in the music which are mirrored by sharp staccato

movements of the body and arms of the dancers. Whilst this section of the dance has been executed, a staircase of eighteen steps has appeared behind them. The dancers form a line at the front of the stage with their backs to the audience and in echoing the march quality in the music ascend the staircase, each level lighting up with big round bulbs. As they get halfway the right-hand side of the dancers descend the staircase whilst the left-hand side continue their ascent, which creates a diagonal line from top to bottom. They strike a pose towards the top left hand corner and Steele appears in a shimmering waistcoat, powder blue trousers and matching straw boater. Steele sings the chorus of the song whilst stepping down the stairs quivering his boater hat, the chorus repeat a series of beats with the balls of the feet. Once he has descended the staircase, the dancers join him in a line at the front of the stage. The movement and tap is very light in its quality and gradually builds in strength with the music. The dancers form a semi-circle around Steele as they all travel sideways with a series of *shuffles* and *ball changes*. The staircase has slowly disappeared allowing the dances to use the depth of the stage forming two lines behind Steele. The dancers remain in these lines for an extended tap break utilising the basic structure of repetitious steps that have a break to signal the end of the phrase. The dancers and Steele sing the title 'Fascinating Rhythm' as the orchestra builds in intensity as they go in and out of tight formations which echo the decrescendo and crescendo in the music. The energy builds and the cast form a straight line at the front of the stage finishing with the head and arms down to the floor.

The context of the performance analysed here is different to that of the musical, this specific performance was presented some twelve years later in a revue show called *What A Show!* starring Tommy Steele. On comparing the arrangement and tap beats on the original recording of *Singin' In the Rain* it is possible to distinguish that the footwork is the same. What is not given to the audience are the scenes that precede the number and the plot point immediately after. However, the programme lists the number in place of the 'Broadway Rhythm' number, so one can imagine that the script is very close to the original text of the screenplay. The number, whilst

a different song, mimics to some extent the energy and rhythm of the original 'Broadway Melody' song sung by Kelly in the film. With Steele, in the Don Lockwood role, front and centre of the dance ensemble, the number does not rely on the extravagance and scale of the film ballet. Instead it scales itself down to be about the central male figure and a group of dancers performing a song and dance as part of the musicalisation of the film 'The Dancing Cavalier'. The choreography is rhythmic in its tap motifs and offers precision line execution of the arms and feet, producing a slick and polished performance that neither embellishes nor detracts from the overall musical. The quality of the movement and costuming is in keeping with the 1928 setting and therefore follows the suggestion in the film of a number that would be in a contemporary, rather than period, setting.

A keen ear can listen to the tap dance breaks on the original stage cast recording and compare them to the original choreography of Kelly – whilst there are similarities in the sounds and rhythms, they are not always identical and are often simplified and executed at slower speed than their on-screen counterparts. Rosaline Carne, theatre critic for *The Guardian*, commented:

> The prevailing mood is the Englishman's idea of Hollywood, brash, noisy and clichéd. While a big band and well rehearsed tap routine will always generate excitement, the show lacks a single spark of originality.
>
> (1983: np)

Robert Cushman, in reviewing the production for *The Observer* also questioned the originality of the piece and the reason for its stage adaptation observing:

> Mainly, because it's too slow. And so are the fade-outs, and the timing of the dialogue, and the story. The tempo of the film is stodged up by the play. And this brings us up against the undodgeable [*sic*.], unanswerable question: why bother? Why try to reproduce – not reinterpret – a masterpiece that is already permanently there, smiling?
>
> (1983: 31)

Cushman continued to consider the complexities of recreating screen material for stage, acknowledging that Kelly's choreography was an expression of himself and therefore does not

sit well on the body and performance style of Steele. The recreation of the choreography, as heard on the cast recording, has been simplified to accommodate a star personality who is not primarily known for their tap dancing talents.

What the British production did offer its audiences was spectacle. The stage is resplendent with revolving stages, podiums and circular staircases, a 1920s limousine, a steam train and although not photographed, provided audiences with the iconic rain scene complete with pouring rain during the duration of the title song.

10.3 The 1985 Broadway Production

Following the London production, the Rosenfields decided to present a production of *Singin' in the Rain* on Broadway during the 1985-1986 season, albeit this production would be significantly different to the Fielding-Steele collaboration. In a seemingly brave move, modern dance choreographer Twyla Tharp was engaged as the director and choreographer of the project. In defence of their choice the Rosenfield's stated 'the London production is a little too close to the film. It made us realize we needed a strong original creative contribution' (cited in Hummler, 1985: 114). Suskin states that in choosing Tharp as the director and choreographer the producers felt 'instead of competing with Gene Kelly, she would add something new to the project' (Suskin, 2017). Bound by the financial burden of maintaining a touring dance company, Tharp thought that the opportunity to do a Broadway musical would offer her, and the company dancers, long term employment and regular pay. She experienced a lack of creative control over the production, retaining some choreography from the Kelly and Donen film which, according to her biography, was a clause in the contract between the producers and MGM (Tharp 1992: 288-289). Tharp's reflections in her 1992 biography consider what was a seemingly difficult production period and experience, yet at the time of the production she stated in an interview in the *New York Post*:

> "Their [the Kelly/Donen dances] essence is so much American culture and tradition", she explains. "why change them? The concepts are embedded in the piece. The dance comes out of the situation. Singin' in the Rain is the classic example of why people dance and sing: this guy has not only had his career saved, he's in love. And it's raining. What better reason to dance?"
>
> (Tharp in Dunning,1985: 24)

The resulting production was a critical failure with Frank Rich in the *New York Times* calling the production a 'Damp Diversion' (1985) and Dan Sullivan in the *Los Angeles Times* labelling the touring production 'crude' (1987). The London choreographer filed a breach of contract in the federal courts claiming that the Rosenfields had contracted him to stage the Broadway production, which considering Gennaro's substantial experience potentially would have been more appropriate (*Variety*, 1985).

Given that the original writers of the screenplay, Comden and Green, were engaged to re-work the screenplay into a musical for stage it would appear that the relationship between Tharp and Comden and Green soured very quickly. With *42nd Street* Broadway pedigree was utilised in the creative team, Comden and Green were established theatre and film writers, who with knowledge of the original material would seem a natural choice in the transposition between the mediums. However, tensions arose between the team, in an undated memo Comden provides some suggestions to the final scene and makes clear her outline was to ensure the plot point was clear to the audience. The last paragraph suggests the rising tension as she pleads with Tharp to resume communication so that they work ahead together. In a later memo to Tharp dated May 15th 1985, almost six weeks prior to the opening, Comden and Green openly question the breakdown in communication between the parties and are bewildered as to why they have been excluded from the rehearsal room. The writers express their understanding of the working relationship between writers and directors in what appears to be an open gesture to try and work together on the final project (1985)[122]. Given Tharp's lack of experience in

[122] Comden and Green Papers, Box 18, Folder 12, Billy Rose Theater Division, The New York Public Library

theatre directing, it seems detrimental to the project that she did not use the knowledge of Comden and Green with the creative process, in her own words she states: 'I figured the acting would take care of itself and put dramatic scenes at the bottom of my rehearsal list' (Tharp, 1992: 296-297). In alliance with their director, the Rosenfields openly supported Tharp rather than the original writers of the material, with Maurice Rosenfield commenting 'I really didn't think the book was terribly important… it's just a device to get from scene to scene' (Churcher, 1985: 44). Unlike the production team on *42nd Street* the destructive relationship between the collaborators marks a potentially catastrophic approach to the material. The rehearsal period of *42nd Street* was fraught with problems between the director and producer, however all the team were established in the craft of musical theatre, and the director and choreographer Gower Champion had extensive experience working in film so could draw upon that knowledge in the adaptation.

Paradoxically, *Singin' in the Rain* brought together a creative team with the writers of the screenplay who were long established musical theatre writers and a director and choreographer who had no musical theatre experience whatsoever, and openly disregarded the genre stating that she would not go and see the musical on Broadway if she were not involved, 'frankly I'm much more involved in film than I am theater, and frankly, I don't have that much interest' (Tharp in Berman, 1985). The production gave work to Tharp's company of dancers, but beyond that it is not clear why Tharp chose to work on a project that is so known to its audiences. The numbers in the musical that do not draw upon the original choreography demonstrate a significantly different style of movement and vocabulary to that of the Kelly movement. As an innovator, Tharp certainly should have the free reign to interpret the material as she wishes, but it is questionable as to why she did not seek a greater integration between the two bodies of work within the production, particularly when the film material is so widely recognised and known. According to the company manager, Tharp disregarded much of the original material

and chose songs from a list of Freed and Brown collaborations that gave her the freedom (Suskin, 2017) she needed. Compounding the problem was, in Suskin's words:

> Twyla added a bunch of extraneous songs by the original songwriters, plus some modern ballet sequences that had little to do with the show and took us far away from the essence of the film. The fact is, Twyla hated theatre and hated musicals—she even said so—and it showed.
> (Suskin, 2017)

Most of the original material is contained in Act One of the production and the newer songs appear in Act Two. At the opening of Act 2, there is a montage sequence that is set on a sound-stage and it evokes the sudden rush of numbers that film studios put in front of the camera during the late 1920s to capitalise on the use of sound in films. However, Tharp misses the point: a montage in the film segues seamlessly between each section, whereas the staging is predictable in terms of entrances and exits, and does not consider the filmic effects that could have been employed. An engaging trio of Rag Dolls dances centre stage, but there seems to be little point or relevance to their performance – the montage is a sequence that would be later cut from the production. In the London equivalent the montage was a series of vignettes that took the audience on to the soundstage to see how films were made, Tharp's ability to transport the audience as the camera would is something that often gets lost in the action. One deviation seemed to tackle the issue of space between the mediums with practical solutions. 'The Broadway Ballet' in the 1952 film is a technicolour dream sequence that presents Kelly's character as an ambitious hoofer who gets caught up in the underworld of gangsters through his infatuation with the sultry vamp Cyd Charisse. The number utilises the expanse of the sound stages at MGM with sprawling neon signs denoting the New York location, a nightclub filled with gyrating dancers and a large fantasy sequence in which Charisse, dressed in a basic white tunic, grapples with a 25-foot length of silk voile attached to her which is kept airborne using giant wind turbines (Hess and Dabholkar, 2009: 164). During the thirteen minutes of screen time the ballet moves location and setting as smoothly as Kelly glides across the floor, yet this

would not be practical in a live theatre setting, or at least practical within the limitations of the space that the Gershwin theatre provided.

Fortunately, the 1985 production has been captured in its entirety on a bootleg video, filmed from the audience, which considering video technology 30 years ago, resulted in a recording that is of surprisingly good quality. However, the viewer is limited to what is captured, and whilst the dance numbers are usually in a full-stage shot, you cannot always see the full stage and cannot ascertain where actors/dancers move when out of shot. This analysis is based on this video as the only professionally shot video that exists are 40 minutes of excerpts in the TOFT archive. Whilst audio and video are compromised, it does allow the viewer to see the choreographic content in some, if not all, its entirety.

In the film screenplay Cosmo outlines a large modern section for the new picture 'The Dancing Cavalier' suggesting that the hero is reading the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, is hit on the head by a Sandbag and upon waking finds himself inside the dream world of the French Revolution. This solution bridges the gap between the period film that is being made at the studio and the need to incorporate more contemporary dance movement (Comden and Green, 1986: 53). At almost thirteen minutes long the resulting ballet on screen has foregone the period theme and thrusts the audience into the contemporary world almost immediately. The narrative presents a young hoofer, eager to make a name for himself on Broadway. He dances in a nightclub, meets and falls in love with a gangster's moll during what is known as the vamp dance (Hess and Dabholkar, 2009: 163), before she leaves him for another man. The hoofer establishes himself as a star and meets the girl later in a casino – he envisages a dream *pas de deux* with her but once again she leaves him. At the conclusion, he witnesses another hoofer arriving and he celebrates the endless cycle that is the 'Broadway Melody'. There is no indication in the preceding dialogue or the scene that follows to explain how a period film would integrate such a modern section, but this does not seem to matter. Hess and Dabholkar acknowledge the dance

as one of the most balanced of all film ballets that Kelly created stating 'it is well crafted, well-danced, and effectively photographed, from every perspective' (2009: 169), despite its lack of continuity within the narrative.

Tharp's version makes no attempt to encapsulate anything from the 1952 film version, instead opting to remain located within the French revolution and period theme in terms of settings and costumes, it is the movement vocabulary and music that has a more contemporary feel. The character of Cosmo, friend and music advisor to actor Don Lockwood, suggests to R.F. Simpson, head of the fictional film studio Monumental Studios, that the film 'The Duelling Cavalier', which is now in sound and a musical titled 'The Dancing Cavalier', requires a large production number. He, along with Don, proposes a sequence about a French aristocrat who travels the country fighting for his country (in between dancing) searching for the heroine of the picture Yvonne. The stage lights dim as the set transitions to the ballet sequence.

The music is light and whilst not authentic, suggests the French courts of the 16th century, with mock lutes and violins in the background. The dream sequence opens with a clear stage and a glowing moon suspended on the backdrop. Six couples are cavorting around the stage in a carefree and frivolous manner representing the bourgeoisie who are enjoying a festive evening. They are dressed in clothing which reflects the 18th century French fashions with the women in panniers and the men in breeches and shoes with a slight heel. Each dancer is paired in a couple who circle the space with a series of extravagant springs with knees lifted high. None of the movement is uniform or in time with each other and each couple have their own steps and stage business with each other. There is a constant whooping and giggling from the dancers throughout.

A French aristocrat (played by Don Lockwood) appears from the side of stage and begins to tap dance around the groups of peasants. His dress is far grander than the peasants, with the shine of costume indicating more elaborate fabrics. As he continues to demonstrate his nimble

footwork to the bemused group one of the peasants recognises him as the 'Dancing Cavalier'. He takes a swig of a drink that he is offered (during the stage business a pirate has appeared and poured something into his drink) and collapses, two thieves appear and spot an opportunity to steal his dancing shoes.

Smoke fills the stage and gradually the stage clears leaving Don lying at the front, the smoke indicates a dreamlike transition. The orchestra switches its melody to a heavier and earthier blues sound, brass instrumentation dominating, and in complete contrast to the locale and setting. The dancers are now dressed as a group of pirates, or corsairs, each paired with a female partner. The relationship between each couple is rougher and less frivolous and the relationship between the two genders is male dominated. Again, there is no uniformity in their movement, each couple has different choreography which is happening at the same time. The varying motifs present the men dragging the women across the floor, throwing them into back bends with their arms flailing and more suggestive movement through the hips and legs. The quality of movement is more modern in its feel with a greater play on gravity and the use of weight and suspension. There are strong accents in the music which are not utilised in the choreography, the movement appears to exist independently to the accompaniment. Through the dancers walks a torch singer who begins to sing a song full of pathos and melancholy. The dancers continue to cavort around the singer, often taking focus away from her.

There is a gradual rhythmic drive from the drums and saxophone and Don (who is carried off at the start of this next section) appears with a woman holding a fan. They hold a position facing each other, bodies very close together. The couple walk across the stage gradually increasing the pace before he takes hold of her neck and throws her from side to side. She slides into the splits and is dragged across the front of the stage before standing and jumping into a high lift above him. Her legs wrap around his body and she slowly slides down his leg to the floor. He once again lifts her in to his arms and she tosses her fan away before extending her legs to the

celling and body to the floor. She is once again lowered to the floor in a 4th position, as he lunges toward her and lifts her through a *plié* in 4th, 2nd and 4th positions back to sitting on the floor. There is constant push and pull within the movement, but it is evident that the character of Don is dominating this *pas de* deux, however it is not made clear why this relationship was established. The lifts do not reflect the period of the piece either in the setting of the ballet (18th century) or in the time in which the musical is set (1928), the placement of the hands and body is far more suggestive and graphic than witnessed in any MGM musical. Toward the climax of the dance, the female dancer is swung across the floor and he jumps over her to slowly lift her to standing as they embrace, signalling some consummation in the relationship. As she retreats, he pulls her back in before she summons her protectors, as she continues to walk away and picks up her fan, two men cross the stage towards him. They push him and initiate a duel, both Don and the man have their hands tied behind their backs. The drama is built in the musical accompaniment using the bass drum and the flares of the brass section. The duelling cavalier fights his way through the men on stage using only his legs. He frees his hands and executes a series of *jetés en tournant* before executing a hand stand which knocks another dancer to the floor. An aristocratic servant appears and presents a chair and his dancing shoes – he sits on the chair and puts his dancing shoes back on. As the servant appears out of nowhere this sudden change seems to indicate that the dream sequence has ended and Don has now awoken and is back with the bourgeoisie.

The peasants appear chanting 'Gotta Dance' as the orchestra pulsates with a driving rhythm leading to the song 'Broadway Rhythm', sung by the ensemble and Don. He executes a series of *trenches* and *pull backs* which are then echoed by the ensemble. This call and response continues during the next three phases of the music. There is some interaction between him and the female dancers and Don's character exhibits a sense of *joie de vivre* in his performance. Whilst the chorus and Don execute movement independently, this is the only section that has any sense of unity with all the on-stage cast dancing the same motifs. As the number builds to a

rousing finish, two men and women in aristocratic dress travel across the stage on roller skates but do not have any relation to the other characters on stage. As the number finishes with a final pose, there is a blackout and the audience is quickly transported back to the 'real' life of the musical and the next scene opens at the premiere of the 'The Dancing Cavalier' film.

Although Tharp's idea of location and setting certainly make sense within the context of the film-within-a-show scenario, the narrative of the resulting eight-minute ballet seems muddled and confused. Admittedly, without being able to see the dance number live somewhat obscures what action the viewer can follow, especially in terms of any business at the far sides of the stage, there is an element of guesswork involved. However, most of the action is presented in a full-screen shot so does allow for the movement to be followed. Yet the movement vocabulary seems at odds with not only the period (and as with most musicals there is artistic license here), there seems little connection to the music or to the story telling. Why does the dancing cavalier suddenly become so aggressive when dancing with the female bandit? And why is Don suddenly given his dancing shoes and return to the peasants at the end? Why do four characters appear at the end on roller skates? There seems little connection between the different segments. When explaining her reasoning for her approach to this ballet, Tharp stated 'Gene Kelly, in virtuosic tap dancing, was one of our greatest practitioners. That was where his interest lay. It was not in group choreography' (Tharp cited in Berman, 1985). Yet the film ballet, and as with other Kelly ballet's in *On the Town* and *An American in Paris*, contain large elements of both group sections and smaller solos and duets, all of which utilise a wide range of dance vocabulary. Whilst the Kelly film ballet offers little in terms of integration into the plot at that point in the film, it has a narrative that corresponds with the lyrics of the song and portrays characters that have a journey. Tharp's ballet seems confused and lacks identity and the absence of knowledge in terms of directing actors seems ever more apparent as the plot of this ballet seems to get lost in the ensuing stage action.

In an unusual twist for film-to-stage adaptations, the use of choreography from the film was incorporated. In the film, and stage production, the number 'Good Morning' takes place in Don's house and is a trio between him, Cosmo and Kathy following the catastrophic preview screening of the studios first talking picture 'The Duelling Cavalier'. It is at the end of this number that Cosmo comes up with the idea of dubbing the voice of silent actress Lina Lamont with Kathy's, a plot point that provides the stimulus for the remainder of the film's narrative. The choreography on film utilises the expanse of the sound stage and Don's apartment is a sprawling cavern with a kitchen, large dining room, several staircases and levels and a large sitting room with two couches allowing for the now infamous walk-over at the climax of the number. Whilst the number would be shot in multiple takes, the layout of the set allows the camera to continuously dolly sideways to follow the actors dancing across the space in what seems like one seamless take, an element of other dances Kelly had created on screen such as 'Make Way for Tomorrow' from *Cover Girl* and *It's Always Fair Weather*. Throughout the number the trio utilise the props and setting to dance around ascending, and swinging down stairs, jumping atop benches and climbing railings and utilising a drinks bar for ballet practice. Its inventive approach is what keeps the number so memorable and the three performers seem to radiate off each other throughout the number.

For the stage version, the location is the same, but there are obvious limitations within the expanse of the set and what is shown on the video footage appears to be props placed in strategic positions, rather than placing the actors in an apartment and experimenting with the movement. Unfortunately, the size and expanse, or lack thereof, imposes many restrictions on the movement. Whilst the choreography is almost verbatim step-for-step, the direction and placement of the movement has been adapted to accommodate the limitations within the set. When the trio dance up the stairs they only have three steps compared to the nine steps in the film, this results in them remaining static rather than being able to be continuous in their movement. There are also some 60 bars of music cut in the stage version which eliminates a

playful exchange with props and different styles of music and the balletic movement, at the bar. Interestingly this has been restored for later versions, although to accommodate limitations in the stage set the number is now performed in the street as opposed to Don's house. Whilst Kelly and Donen are given credit for the original choreography in the playbill, there is no credit as to who re-created the staging and steps used. Tap dancing was not part of Tharp's vocabulary, so it is unclear who re-staged the film sequences and how much direction was given from Tharp. Biographer Marcia B. Siegel claims that Tharp dancer John Carrafa was responsible for learning the dances and taught them in his role as assistant to the director (2006:208).

The resulting footage exemplifies the problematic nature of transitioning dance between the mediums of film and live theatre. Whilst adapting the book, music and lyrics must consider the ability to convey character and plot development through different devices, re-arranging dance numbers is bound by the limitations of what the stage space could offer. All professional productions of the musical have incorporated the rain sequence for the title number and most choreographers pay homage to Kelly and his pose as he clings to the lamppost. However, this theatrical device is only achieved by utilising a truck which can catch the water and drain it away, and this truck also constricts the range of available stage space for the dancer.

Singin' in the Rain as a stage musical has ultimately had far greater success in the UK than it has in the US, in terms of major productions. The Tommy Steele production was revived at the London Palladium for a short run in 1989, this production also toured the UK in 1995 and 1996. London's National Theatre presented a production in 2000 (choreography by Stephen Mear), Sadler's Well's in 2004 (choreography by Adam Cooper) and a 2012 West End revival (choreography by Andrew Wright), all of which use the libretto based on the 1986 US touring production. There seems to be no steadfast reason as to why the musical has attained more success here than in its US production, however the film is considered an American masterpiece and one

should consider that the stage production is instantly compared to the original film whose leads, Kelly, Reynolds and O'Connor, were synonymous not only with the film, but also with the golden age of Hollywood musicals. Whilst British audiences are undoubtedly familiar with the film and the film stars are Hollywood icons, they are not necessarily part of the British consciousness. The Fielding/Steele production aligned itself far more closely to the film and featured Steele, a British pop icon, in the lead, so attempted to compensate in some areas. Whether a fan or not, Steele has a charm that whilst not in the Kelly mould, offers an energy to the iconic role, and he has a significant presence in British popular culture.

The US tour version of the musical made significant changes and did not contain any of the Tharp material and this is the version that is now licensed throughout the world to production companies. Table 10.3. below outlines different productions in comparison to the original film to indicate the song choices and order of scenes. The film itself was rich in musical material, but also had more scenes due to films ability to change location so readily. Stage productions have further expanded the musical material to facilitate the limitations that staging offers in terms of scenic changes. This expansion is similar to that of *42nd Street's* additional musical material offers a significant array of production numbers not featured in the original film and have all been conceived exclusively for the stage production. Suskin, who continues to look after the production states:

> After Broadway, though, we switched to a different version—without the Twyla, Comden & Green alterations—and over the years have more than recovered the loss. Over several productions of the stage version, we realized that the further we strayed from the "feeling" of the film, the less effective the stage version became.
>
> (Suskin, 2017)

Whilst the touring version has played extensively in US regional theatres since the 1986/1987 tour, it has yet to have a Broadway staging. A 2015 staging at the Theatré du Châtelet in Paris was announced to be opening on Broadway during the 2016-2017 season, but further reports have announced it is now delayed (Stedman, 2017). With the 2014 stage adaptation of the

film *An American in Paris*, it seems that there is a new generation of audiences available for these films. With over 60 years passing since their original premieres, audiences that may have only seen the films through home video or television screenings are now enticed to see them live on stage. Much of the failure of the 1985 stage production has been linked to the material that was created by Tharp and the critics savaged the work at the premiere of the musical. Significantly, 1985 was the first and only year that the annual Tony Awards denied the Best Choreography category due to the lack of contenders for the award (Mandelbaum, 1997). In appraising the work of ballet choreographer Christopher Wheeldon on the stage adaptation of *An American in Paris*, which makes no attempt to recreate the 1951 film and offers many songs not found in the original, Suskin was asked whether he thought *Singin' in the Rain* with Tharp at the helm would work in the 21st century. He commented:

> Singin' in the Rain is a simplistic story; simple but fun, with musical numbers that the theatre audience is most likely to love. As soon as you try to get sophisticated, though, the audience starts to reject the story. In our more contemporary productions, we faced increasing resentment from a significant portion of the audience.
>
> (Suskin, 2017)

However, the audience of 2017 is considerably different to those of the 1980s and the MGM musicals are films, which whilst readily available, are increasingly less part of the culture of the 21st century. Towards the end of the 20th century several stage versions of film musicals were produced, but other than *42nd Street*, none found an audience large enough to sustain a long run. Suskin believes that part of the issue is that when the original creative teams are no longer available to work on the adaptation, the musical loses its sense of integration by shoe-horning additional numbers that are not a direct continuation of the character's singing (Suskin, 2017). The film-to-stage adaptations that were attempted during the 1970's and 1980s, notably *Gigi, Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *Singin' in the Rain* and *Meet Me in St. Louis* are almost all prestige pictures. Either through their recognition by the American Film Institute or the Academy Awards, or through the casting of such film stars as Kelly and Garland. Audiences of the 1980s were potentially of an age that would have remembered the original films in their first release and

so have a stronger connection to the songs and film stars of the period. Younger audiences were attracted to the British mega musicals such as *Les Miserables* and *The Phantom of the Opera* which had little to do with nostalgia and reliving memories of celluloid fantasies, ironically adaptations from novels themselves. Whilst Champion, Stewart and Merrick took *42nd* Street, a then 50-year old black and white film musical, and reworked it into a stage adaptation that has had a significant longevity, they presented a musical that expanded on the original, but stayed true to the form of musical comedy. *Singin' in the Rain* already had to contend with the memories of Kelly, O'Connor and Reynolds, so why Tharp chose to deviate from public expectation seems a brave, but ultimately unsuccessful experiment. This production demonstrated an important lesson, if a producer and creative team are going to utilise audience familiarity in a film-to-stage vehicle, the audience needs to be able celebrate the stage interpretation of celluloid memories not, as in the case of this 1985 production, witness a production that is so far removed from the original source that it is unrecognisable.

A Comparison of Musical Numbers in Various Productions of *Singin' in the Rain*

1952 MGM Film		1983 London	1984 Broadway	1986 US Tour and licensed Version	1989/1995 UK Tour
1. Grauman's Chinese Theatre **2. Montage of Don's Early Life** *Fit As A Fiddle* **3. Monumental Studios** **4. Inside Grauman's Chinese Theatre** **5. Hollywood Boulevard** **6. Driveway of R.F. Simpson's Mansion** **7. Simpson's Living Room** *All I Do is Dream of You* **8. Monumental Studios** *Make 'Em Laugh* **9. Set of "The Duelling Cavalier"** **10. Montage of Headlines** **11. Soundstage** *Beautiful Girl* (Kathy would sing *You Are My Lucky Star* outside a billboard of Don Lockwood, but was deleted) **12. Sound stage** *You Were Meant For Me* **13. Interior Dinsmore Office** **14. Interior Diction Coach Office** *Moses* **15. Sneak Preview of "The Duelling Cavalier"** **16. Don's House** *Good Mornin'* **17. Street Outside Kathy's House** *Singin' in the Rain* **18. Simpson's Office** **19. Recording Stage** *Would You?* **19.a. Dream Sequence** *Broadway Melody/Broadway Rhythm*	ACT ONE	**1. Grauman's Chinese Theatre** **2. Vaudeville Theatre** *Fit As a Fiddle** **3. The studios of Monumental Pictures** **4. Backstage and on stage at the premiere of "The Royal Rascal"** **5. R.F. Simpson's mansion** *Temptation* *I Can't Give You Anything But Love* **6. The Studios of Monumental Pictures** **a) Filming a Western** **b) An empty studio** *Be a Clown* **c) Filming a Musical** *Too Marvellous For Words* **d) A sound stage** *You Are My Lucky Star** **e) The Versailles set for "The Duelling Cavalier"** *Moses Supposes**	*PART 1:* **1. Grauman's Chinese Theatre** **2. Altoona, PA** *Fit As A Fiddle** **3. Grauman's Chinese Theatre** **4. Hollywood Boulevard** *Beautiful Girl* **5. The Coconut Grove** *I've Got a Feeling Your Fooling* *PART 2:* **6. Silent Stage** *Make 'Em Laugh* *Hub Bub* **7. Shooting "The Duelling Cavalier"** **8. An empty soundstage** *You Stepped Out of a Dream* *You Are My Lucky Star* **9. Diction Lessons** *Moses Supposes** **10. Shooting "The Duuelling Cavalier"** *PART 3:* **11. The Glendale Theatre** **12. Don's House** *Good Mornin'** **13. A Street near Kathy's house** *Singin' in the Rain**	**1. Grauman's Chinese Theatre** **1a. Vignette #1and #2 Altonna, PA** *Fit As a Fiddle* **2. Inside Grauman's Chinese Theatre** **3. Stage of the Theatre** **4. Hollywood Boulevard** *You Stepped Out of Dream* **5. R.F. Simpson's Mansion** *All I Do is Dream of You* Reprise: You Stepped Out of Dream **6. Monumental Studios Sound stage** *Make 'Em Laugh* **7. Filming of "The Duelling Cavalier"** **8. Monumental Studios sound stage** *Beautiful Girl* *You are My Lucky Star* **9. Deserted sound stage** *You Were Meant For Me* **10. Vocal Coach's office** *Moses Supposes* **11. Filming " The Duelling Cavalier"** *Moses Supposes* **12. Outside a movie theatre** **12a. Inside the movie theatre** **12b. Outside a movie theatre** **13. Don's House** *Good Morning* **14. Street outside Kathy's house** *Singin' in the Rain*	**1. Grauman's Chinese Theatre** **2. Vaudeville Theatre** *Fit As a Fiddle** **3. The studios of Monumental Pictures** **4. Backstage and on stage at the premiere of "The Royal Rascal"** **5. R.F. Simpson's mansion** *Temptation* *All I Do Is Dream of You* **6. The Studios of Monumental Pictures** **a) Filming a Western** **b) An empty studio** *Make 'Em Laugh* **c) Filming a Musical** *You Stepped Out of a Dream* **d) A sound stage** *You Are My Lucky Star* **e) The Versailles set for "The Duelling Cavalier"** *Moses Supposes**

20. Inside the Looping Room **21. Simpson's Office** **22. Premiere of "The Dancing Cavalier"** **23. Inside Grauman's Chinese Theatre** *Singin' in the Rain* *You Are My Lucky Star*	ACT TWO	**1. Sneak Preview of "The Duelling Cavalier"** **2. Don Lockwood's House** *Good Morning** **3. Outside's Don's home** *Singin' in the Rain** **4. The dubbing studio** *Would You* **5. The sound stage** *Fascinating Rhythm* **6. Backstage and on stage at the premiere of "The Dancing Cavalier"** *Singin' in the Rain* **7. Finale** *You Are My Lucky Star*	**1. Filming musical numbers at Warner Brothers Studio** *Wedding of the Painted Doll* *Rag Doll* *Takin' Miss Mary to the Ball* *Love is Where You Find it* **2. Monumental Pictures' Recording Studio** **a) The next day** **b) Later that week** *Would You?* **3. Title production number in "The Dancing Cavalier"** *Broadway Rhythm* *Blue Prelude* **4. Grauman's Chinese Theatre** *Would You?* *You Are My Lucky Star* *Singin' in the Rain*	**1. R.F. Simpson's Office** **2. Recording Stage** *Would You?* **3. On the Lot/Lina's Dressing Room** *What's Wrong with Me?* **4. R.F Simpson's Office** *Broadway Melody* **5. Grauman's Chinese Theatre** **5b. Inside the theatre** **5c. Backstage and on stage** *Would You?* *You Are My Lucky Star* *Singin' in the Rain*	**1. Sneak Preview of "The Duelling Cavalier"** **2. Don Lockwood's House** *Good Morning** **3. Outside's Don's home** *Singin' in the Rain** **4. The dubbing studio** *Would You* **5. The sound stage** *Fascinating Rhythm* **6. Backstage and on stage at the premiere of "The Dancing Cavalier"** *Singin' in the Rain* **7. Finale** *You Are My Lucky Star*
***indicates choreography is based upon the work of Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen**					

Table 10.3: A comparison of Scenes and Musical Numbers from Significant Stage productions in the US and UK

Conclusion

This purpose of this thesis has been to examine the role and development of the choreographer in MGM film musicals and attempt to ascertain, to what extent, the choreographic material could be viewed through the auteur lens. As established in Chapter 2, the auteur theory considered the work of directors but has later been relocated to consider other roles in the mode of film production, such as producers and film studios. Due to the politics endemic to the studio system, choreographers have never been fully recognised for their on-screen work. Although dance was in its most creative stage in film musicals, little recognition was given to the many choreographers contracted by the studios during the golden age. What this research has uncovered is that there is a rich legacy of work that is readily available for examination captured on film. In utilising both archival and visual resources, significant information has been uncovered that provides insight into the creative elements of film choreography. The methodologies employed have enabled five specific outcomes to this research:

1. An understanding of the working practices of choreographers in the studio system
2. Developments in the auteur debate further enhancing the status and role of the choreographer in film and musical theatre
3. A greater historical context to the politics surrounding the lack of industry recognition for choreographers
4. A model of dance analysis applicable to film and stage musicals
5. Further contribution to adaptation studies specifically examining screen-to-stage musicals with a focus on the dance elements

In beginning the research process, it became clear that choreographers have largely been ignored in dance and theatre scholarship, yet the very essence of a musical film (and theatre) combines and relies on all three elements of song, text and dance. Research has acknowledged the work of directors such as Minnelli (McElhaney, ed., 2009), Donen (Silverman 1996) and more recently Walters (Phillips 2014). One of the initial research questions considered when other creative elements of musical film were so lauded, why was dance not equally as recognised? The Freed Unit, as an example of the workings of the studio system, is synonymous with

developing the forms of the integrated film musical that were created through collaborative partnerships. Each element, scriptwriters, composers and lyricists, directors and producer, all work to construct a cohesive film in which the performative elements spoke with a unified voice. However, each of these elements, while created in collaboration, are strong enough in their own right to withstand closer examination, and yet the dance element, has not hitherto, been the subject of the same degree of scrutiny as text and song. The very essence of integration in film musicals ensured that each component of song, text and dance were united, yet purposeful, in its contribution to character and narrative progression. These very films, such as *Singin' in the Rain, It's Always Fair Weather* and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, use dance as a means of expression to further the plot.

The commercial nature of film distribution also facilitated a far-reaching exposure of dance to a wider audience than theatre can offer, and using home video and media, new audiences are continually exposed to MGM musicals. As identified in Chapter 3, MGM broke new ground in musical film production by significantly contributing an array of different sub-genres to appeal to differing audience tastes. Its roster of stars included more dancers than any other studio which undoubtedly contributed to the significant role that dance would play.

The main findings of this research can be grouped as followed:

11.1 The choreographer as auteur

The early choreographers, namely Lee, Connolly, and Gould provided most of the dance numbers for the early 1930s musicals, but at this point in film history dance had not fulfilled its potential to be integrated. Most films released were backstage musicals which provided a springboard for dance to happen, but beyond showcasing the star of the film, did little to contribute to the overall character or narrative arc. The lack of dance experience alone limited

the ability for choreographers to develop an individual style that is recognisable across a body of work. At this point I would like to refer back to Sarris' principles in identifying authorship:

> 1. The technical competence of a director as a criterion scale of values
> 2. The distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature
> 3. Interior meaning – the ultimate glory of the cinema as art. Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material.
>
> (Sarris, 1962, cited in Grant, 2008: 42-43)

The technical competence of the choreographer is ascertained through both their ability to work with the vocabulary specific to the genre of dance employed, their ability to stage creatively for the camera and their ability to understand how dance on screen can effectively be captured. The early choreographers lack depth and scope within their work, the dance steps are basic and the choreographic patterns are often repetitious and formulaic. Ultimately, the choreography may provide a visual spectacle, but in close analysis does little more than provide uniformity in its choreographic approach. Berkeley, although not the focus of this research, singularly elevated his status as a choreographer by assuming control over the direction and filming of his dances, something that Lee, Gould and Connolly did not. Alton, despite a more knowledgeable background in dance, created movement that acted as a *divertissement* however, as demonstrated in studio production records, exerted a greater influence on the choreographic sections of films. He presented outlines for dance numbers that considered both the narrative requirements and the suggestions for filming and camera angles. Although dance in many of Alton's films take the form of a spectacle, it is in his collaborations with Astaire that dance became more significant. 'This Heart of Mine' from *Ziegfeld Follies* is one such example that possesses a strong narrative, but the number is a vignette in what is a revue film so does not have any broader connection to the other vignettes presented.

Pan is the first choreographer who has a more recognisable style, yet his significant collaborations with Astaire complicate the examination of authorial control due to Astaire's own

personal style being so identifiable. If the lens is transferred to Pan's work with dancers such as Miller and other star dancers, his authorial voice is much more prominent. Miller's performances contained formulaic motifs, yet in Pan's choreography, these patterns were often broken. Pan's ability as a dancer, predominately in the tap genre, is significant here as rhythmical phrasing and composition of steps is more varied and offers more diversity in Miller's performances. Pan, first and foremost, excelled at presenting 'star' numbers, exhibiting the skill towards featuring dancers who were leading actors with, or without, an ensemble. Pan's sensibilities demonstrate an understanding of the style of a dancer, yet the ability to create movement that did not become a repetition of the same steps or movement phrases. As an auteur, Pan is not as clear-cut, due to the nature and sub-genre of films he worked on. Pan has expressed, as discussed in Chapter 5, his involvement in the film, yet as he never assumed the role of director, his dances are not always a necessity to the plot.

Although Pan's technical competence and stylistic influence are certainly recognisable, many of his numbers were show-within-film settings and therefore did not contribute significantly enough to the plot of the film. Essentially, self-reflexive musicals, such as backstage and biopic sub-genres, do not facilitate enough narrative contribution through the musical numbers. While providing context to the genre, these numbers could be interchanged with other examples and performers without interrupting the flow or narrative of the film. This is not to say that only integrated musical films provide consideration for authorship, it is simply a genre that offers a more cohesive package, with all elements working in harmony to push the plot forward.

Loring, Cole and Kidd all offer more significant movement vocabularies and utilisation of dance techniques, both of which combine a strong stylistic signature. Loring, in his use of ballet and jazz idioms, worked with dancers such as Astaire and Charisse, who possess a strong on-screen presence in their own performance style. As a result, Loring's authorship gets lost as the performer takes over. This is similar to Cole, whose choreographic style is much more defined and evident due to his exploration of dance styles from other cultures, yet the dances become

isolated numbers. In these instances both the work of Loring and Cole, whilst certainly elevating dance beyond the formulaic basic movement vocabularies of the 1930s, act as spectacles and not necessarily offer any significant dramaturgical progression.

Kidd becomes the exception, his use of dance in *Seven Brides* is so embedded within the dramaturgy that the movement motifs become an extension of the physical traits of each character. The movement only serves the situation and does not act as spectacle, even in 'The Barn Dance' the spectacle becomes the very physical acts that the dancers demonstrate in acrobatic skills, yet the number establishes a plot point that is central to the later development of the narrative in the film. Kidd's movement style is also significantly identifiable and presents a strong personality on screen. Kidd would later go on to direct, both in film and theatre, and the directorial sensibility evident in his work signifies a prominent presence in the contribution of the dance material. The ability to direct suggests why stage choreographers, such as Robbins and Fosse, are considered auteurs due to the strong stylistic presence over all elements of the production. In Kidd's earlier film *The Band Wagon,* the dance work is overshadowed by director Minnelli and actor Astaire, two distinct personalities who project unmistakable stylistic traits within the movie. Donen, director of *Seven Brides*, exerts technical competence in filming techniques, but Kidd's work dominates the film when the dancers are in action both in large ensemble numbers or in the smaller intimate numbers.

This research has demonstrated that the choreographer-auteur is, conceptually speaking, a possibility, but is bound by certain conditions dictated through the collaborative creative process. I propose the following criteria below is utilised when examining a body of work from specific choreographers in order to assert authorship:

- Choreographers who are well versed in dance vocabulary specific to the genre of dance engaged with
- Dance numbers advance beyond the repetition of formulaic choreographic and movement patterns
- A strong visual and movement style is recognisable through the body of work

- Musical numbers are not extraneous to the plot
- The dancers/actors own technical abilities are utilised in the choreography and contribute to setting/mood/character

Furthering the auteur lens to consider actors proved less complex than the choreographer, yet identifying the actor-auteur is not straightforward. The need to identify the actor-auteur was necessary due to the interdisciplinary nature of film musicals, certain case studies were both actors *and* choreographers. Dyer's rationale for the star as auteur, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, is well-defined and provides a clear set of criteria in which to examine the body of work of specific actors:

1. Stars who had complete control over their image/performance
2. Stars who made a contribution to developing their image
3. Stars who were a disparate voice amongst many
4. Stars who were almost totally the product of the studio/Hollywood machine

(Dyer, 1986a: 175)

Astaire and Kelly, as dancers and choreographers, emerge as significant contributors to dance in the film musical; they also possess a strong performance style, each very distinctive from the other, projected through their on-screen characters. The studio did not produce Astaire and Kelly's images, they were a manifestation of their personalities, albeit in a performance mode. Stylistically (not technically) their dance abilities were beyond those of their peers and enabled them to be prominent actors in the musical genre. In addition to their status as actor-auteurs, both also choreographed, Astaire for himself, and Kelly for the entire film. Kelly would also go on to assume the dual role of director-choreographer and would imprint his visual style throughout the entire film, most notably in *Singin' in the Rain*. Astaire's performance style never changed, particularly when working with other choreographers, and to that extent as an auteur Astaire's presence commanded a film and its narrative would play to his stylistic traits. As mentioned above, when Astaire danced Kidd's choreography in *The Band Wagon*, Astaire dominated the film, even when the vocabulary was different to the usual Astaire trope.

In the case of other dancers analysed, the case for authorship is not as strong. Eleanor Powell, a more defined product of the studio system concerning image, is the only contender who projected a strong onscreen presence. However, this is only evident in her early films of the 1930s where the film and narrative centre around Powell's dance skills. Later films relegated her roles to secondary characters, and it is here that the actor as auteur reaches a significant hurdle, first and foremost it is the star of the film that holds the key to authorship. Astaire and Kelly dominated the films in which they appeared, Powell, Miller and Charisse did not as they played secondary roles in films that were not based on their talents. However, I suggest that there is potential to consider her as a *dancer-auteur*. I make the distinction, from actors and choreographers, as dancers who:

- Possess a discernible dance style
- Demonstrate technical abilities that influence the choreography created (either by themselves or by a choreographer)
- Exhibit an on-screen image and performance fashioned on their own idiosyncrasies
- Demonstrate recurring motifs within their body of work

The criteria above allows for the dancers discussed here to be considered as authors and contributing to the characters and/or images that they projected on-screen. Powell, while less prominent during the latter part of her career, continued to provide a body of work that utilised the performance tropes identified in the analysis of her earlier work as explained in Chapter 7. Miller, although working alongside choreographers, continued to present film dances that included the same vocabulary and from film to film projected a strong and aggressive performance style. As tap dancers, Powell and Miller were exemplary technicians who both exhibited unique on-screen personalities and they were unmatched in their film careers by any other female tap dancer. Charisse, featured in more leading roles as her star ascended, partly due to her ability to mould to emerging dance forms making her a desirable dance partner for Astaire and Kelly. Similarly to Miller and Powell, Charisse's on-screen personality and dance style is unchanged from film to film and is formed around her physical and technical attributes. Miller and Charisse, unlike Powell, embraced conventions of femininity at the time and would

be costumed in a wardrobe that emphasised their shapely physiques and emphasising their legs in close-up shots. The suggestion of the dancer-auteur opens the scope of identifying an authorial voice and would be beneficial in examining other dancers of the period under contract.

As Part 2 of this thesis moved away from MGM and explored the concepts of adaptation between different mediums, authorial voices were explored in the two case studies of *42nd Street* and *Singin' in the Rain*. Champion, whose well-established career as director-choreographer on stage, presents similar choreographic motifs amongst the many dances he created. His authorial voice is evident throughout the entire production of *42nd Street* due to his understanding of how film operates and the dance numbers are used to create smooth transitions between scenes. Champion does not try to recreate the visual patterns of Berkeley's from the film, instead he fashions a series of musical numbers that pay homage to the source material but do not try to recreate. Champion's authorial voice ultimately mutes Berkeley's to create a musical theatre adaptation that is so original in its choreographic content that one can argue that it surpasses the memory of its source material. It is also strongly evident that in the 2001 revival of *42nd Street*, despite Skinner creating new numbers which hue more closely to Berkeley's visual style, Champion's authorial voice continues to be present. The new choreography blends with the existing Champion work and is not distinct enough to provide a new authorial voice. This is in no way detrimental to the work of Skinner; it is simply a reflection of his ability to expand on existing material and contribute work which compliments the original choreography. To this extent, in answering one of the research questions outlined in the introduction, Champion's choreographic approach has successfully captured the aesthetics of past choreographers but developed his own distinct style through the entire production. As a predominant dance genre of the 1930s, the utilisation of tap dance evokes the period, as does using songs from a series of Warner Brothers films of the same era. The very suggestion of the period through the dance style and musical elements allows the choreographic freedom to experiment with the dance material.

In the case of *Singin' in the Rain*, Tharp's authorial voice is equally present, as is that of Kelly and Donen. The recreation of Kelly and Donen's choreography provides audiences with a degree of familiarity to the source material. However, in relocating the film to the confines of the stage removes the expansiveness that becomes identifiable in Kelly's choreographic work as discussed in Chapter 6. It is also performed by actors who do not possess the same performance style of Kelly, O'Connor and Reynolds and the choreography does not have the same sense of spontaneity that is captured on film. One must consider that the stage material is being watched on a video recording so does not capture the 'liveness' of being in the theatre. When the choreography is recreated, Kelly and Donen's choreographic voice is very evident, and it is a testament to the strength of their work that it remains as relevant in 1985 as it did in 1952. Tharp's authorship is without question; however, it becomes more obvious because of its inability to coalesce with its filmic source. Her choreographic style is so at odds with the time-period in which it is set that it does not cohere with the rest of the action. Whereas Champion offered period appropriate staging that continued to serve the source material and was later continued with Skinner's additions in the revival, Tharp's contributions are so at odds with the source that it disengages itself from the elements of the original film that do exist. In the case of this adaptation, Tharp has clearly tried to assert her own originality through the devising of new material, but it lacks an ability to integrate itself with the film material that has been recreated. *Singin' in the Rain*, like other period musicals, offers an abundance of choreographic opportunities, but in this instance requires an approach that pays homage to the original whilst developing new ideas that are appropriate to the time and setting, as featured in *42nd Street*. There is opportunity for the choreographer to balance originality, but it requires appreciation of what has gone before.

It has been acknowledged that adaptation studies have largely ignored the process of screen-to-stage adaptation, focusing predominately on the translation of novels and plays to screen. Fundamentally, understanding the requirements of musical theatre are first and foremost

important as the genre, in utilising the elements of song, dance and text, has specific requirements. In the case of the two examples discussed in this thesis, the creative teams drew upon established musical theatre writers. Engel's methodology for musical theatre writing, presented in Chapter 8, may seem outdated, but it is still one of the only established models of writing for musical theatre. Engel graduates Terence McNally and Alan Menken have long established careers, Menken prominently has adapted several of his Walt Disney animated films into stage musicals, and provides some verification that Engel's understanding of musical theatre adaptation is relevant. Screen-to-stage adaptations vary significantly in their ability to survive the commercial nature of the theatre industry, those musicals that have fared better have one thing in common: they remain faithful to their source material while not being a carbon copy of what was seen on the screen. Successful productions such as *42nd Street* do not attempt to recycle the original. Champion instead constructs a production that remains faithful to the mood and intention of the film and provides familiarity through the songs and dialogue. The ability to transport a source to another medium also provides the choreographer and director with a clearer authorial voice as they, in the already quoted words of Stiehl (2008: 58), 'master-weave' their stylistic tendencies through the entire project. Theatre enables the greater potential for auteurs because many choreographers established themselves as directors which facilitates a unified voice to be present in the entire musical. In film production, only Berkeley, Walters, Donen, Kelly and Kidd achieved the status of directors which elevated their ability to impart their visual style through all elements of the film, however only Kidd and Kelly continued to contribute to the choreographic elements.

11.2 Resources and limitations of the study

The resources available for this study are substantial, not least given the availability of MGM's complete collection of musical films which have been widely distributed on home media since the 1980s. Archives, notably the Margaret Herrick Library and the University of Southern

California, survey the history of making films in Hollywood and offered rich sources found in the production files. Frustratingly, MGM is the one studio whose collections are not complete and distributed across several institutions in the USA. Archival research of all films produced by the Freed Unit was instrumental in the examination of the studio system, yet production files on the Pasternak and Cummings units are not publically accessible in any archival library. The period on which this study focuses also provides limitations in the availability of participants for interviews: only a small number of actors and dancers are alive, many now in their mid-80s and beyond. I am particularly grateful to the TCM Archival project who interviewed over 300 personnel during the mid-1990s and these unedited interviews offer first-hand accounts of the creation of MGM films. The opportunity to personally interview dancers such as Marge Champion, Sylvia Lewis, Miriam Nelson, Barrie Chase, Larry Billman and Fred Curt was instrumental in examining the contribution of choreographers and to establish an understanding of the rehearsal and creative processes. Lewis and Curt, two silent voices in the Hollywood studio system who did not wish to become actors, were particularly beneficial because they worked in most of the major studios alongside an array of choreographers with differing approaches to the creative process.

Musical theatre, because of its 'liveness', is an area of research, particularly in the UK, that is more difficult to seek out in terms of research materials. The New York Public Library for Preforming Arts, which houses the Billy Rose Theater Collection, the Jerome Robbins Dance Division and the Theatre on Film and Tap Archives, and the US Library of Congress offer collections whose scope is far beyond any other theatre archive. Yet, specific production information is all dependent on whether this information has been kept and archived. The Theatre Museum collection at the V&A museum focuses on British theatre, but housed in their collections are limited sources that focus on specific productions or offer video footage. The lack of research material in the UK makes it a more complicated enquiry, and sadly much of musical theatre history has not been well documented, other than by private collectors. However, what

material is readily available on both the east and west coast of the USA offers many opportunities for further research.

11.3 Final Thoughts and opportunities for further studies

In his 1981 postscript, Rick Altman proposes that there remains considerable research and analysis openings focusing on the use of dance and music within film musicals. Altman emphasises that the absence of technical knowledge to underpin the analysis has contributed to this lack of examination, yet in the ensuing 30 years there has been little development. This study highlights the plethora of readily available research material for further studies in what is, until now, a somewhat unchartered territory in dance studies. MGM may have been the leading studio in musical film production, but significant work was also created at RKO, Warner Bros., and 20th Century Fox studios. Archival material for these studios is much more centralised in specific libraries and catalogued in much more detail. Choreographers, and actor-dancers, discussed in this study also moved to other studios facilitating further studies on specific people. The last few years have seen newer studies arising, such as choreographer Pan (Franceschina, 2012), yet Loring and Kidd have not been examined in such detail. Similarly, at MGM, the production units of Pasternak and Cummings provide significant scope for further research as interest in the golden age of Hollywood continues. At the start of this thesis it became evident that the wealth of film material meant judicious choices had to be made regarding the analysis, but what this study has proven is that there is much more opportunity for discussion. As discussed in Chapter 2, dance analysis is subjective, but my own interdisciplinary background has facilitated an ability to provide detailed analytical examinations of the selected material that focuses on specific dance vocabularies, rhythmical and musical patterns and the process of designing dance specifically for film and musical theatre. Mueller's (1985) study of Astaire's body of work is richly detailed, but the analysis lacks an underpinning knowledge of dance techniques. There is

much scope to contribute further to dance studies by exploring the myriad of musical numbers that exist in film musicals.

The politics of the studio system and the lack of union and industry recognition meant that the voice of the choreographer was ultimately muted. In the hierarchical structure of art, the status of musical films has never really elevated beyond that of mass entertainment, yet the dance components provide a rich body of work through which to examine a significant contribution to further dance on film studies. Foucault's identification of the 'author' addresses the power imbalance and restores the choreographer as an identifiable artist whose stylistic tendencies, or mise en scène, permeate through the work of other authorial voices within collaborative projects. Whilst any choreographer could claim authorship over their dance contributions this research identifies that the notion of the choreographer as auteur, in terms of influencing the entire film, is justified when the mise en scène of the choreographer go beyond the dance content and influence other components such as character and narrative. Transposing the authorial voice between performance modes is more complex as the authorial voice is intrinsically embedded within the source material. As a result, the choreographer of a new production is required to acknowledge this in order to move forward and develop their own voice. The source of Champion's choreography is still rooted in the visual patterning of Berkeley's on-screen creations but the movement content and choreographic devices go further in creating a more cohesive integration between the book, music and dance, something that is never realised in a Berkeley film. In the case of *Singin' in the Rain*, Tharp's own personal style is so strong that it is constantly at odds with the source material, as there is no attempt to engage with the source material beyond recreating the screen dances for the stage. Tharp's tendency to try and erase the memory of the original completely undermines the authorial voice as there is no cohesion. With screen to stage adaptation established as a new genre, the choreographer is limited by the source material as a starting point, but, with sensitivity to the style and period of the piece has the potential to create their own identity in their own choreography.

Although the studio system no longer exists, MGM's influence on present day dance in film and theatre is still readily evident. In the 2016 film *La La Land*, choreographer Mandy Moore and director Damien Chazelle pay homage to many existing film sequences. On stage, new adaptations and productions of Astaire and Rogers' *Top Hat* and *An American in Paris* have continued to entertain audiences around the world, as have new revivals of *42nd Street* and *Singin' in the Rain*. As technology evolves the ability to watch the MGM musicals continues to expand to audiences worldwide and in teaching, it is refreshing to see new students who have continued to be inspired by the actors and choreographers discussed here. The golden age of the musical film may be a distant memory, but the legacy remaining from the studio system has a proven longevity and continues to garner interest. It is hoped that further dance and film studies will continue to explore the past and raise awareness of the many people that contributed to 'authoring' the canon of films produced. Within my own teaching I will continue to honour and present earlier work to students to encourage them to develop their skills built on the early foundations of jazz and tap dance styles. At the 2017 Big Apple Tap Festival in New York City, guest teachers continued to emphasise the past traditions of the tap dancers from theatre and film, with more contemporary tap teachers cross-referencing their work with the rich legacy dancers and teachers that have gone before them.

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Kerry Novick Kelly, Telephone Interview by Nathan James, 15th July 2013, Telephone interview, London, UK
Lee Roy Reams, Interview by Nathan James, 3rd August 2015), New York, USA
Randy Skinner, Interview by Nathan James, 23rd July 2013, New York, USA
Steven Suskin, Telephone interview by Nathan James, 3rd August 2017, New York, USA

Emails:

Yap, J., (2017) *Email to Nathan James*, 1st August.

Appendix 1: Glossary of Dance & Music Terminology Used

Key:

Bk. Backwards
Ft. *Foot*
Fwd. Forward

Between the USA and UK, and other schools of dance, there are slight variations on the terminology used. Being a British born dancer, schooled predominately in the UK styles of dance the terminology utilised in this thesis relies on that vocabulary. Clarification has been sought from the Royal Academy of Dance syllabus and Mark Knowles's *Tap Dance Dictionary* (1998).

Aerials	An acrobatic movement, like a cartwheel, only the hands do not touch the floor and the body is suspended in the air.
Arabesque	A balance on one leg in which the working leg is extended and raised behind the body. There is a sense of curve from the head through to the spine.
Attitude	This is a curved line of the leg which can be at the front of the body or at the back whilst standing on the supporting leg.
Attitude Leap	A jump in the air where both legs are bent at right angles, one in front, one behind the body line.
Attitude Lift	The dancer is lifted with one or both legs in the attitude shape, the back is usually against the partner and the legs are curved in front.
Back Bend	A bend of the back from the waist going towards the floor. The head will usually lead the movements.
Ball Change	A quick change of weight from one foot to the other.
Ballon	The ability to show lightness in elevated movement and a good coordinatedf use of plié to achieve the necessary push off the floor.
Barrel Turns	A leap in the air in which the body rotates on its own axis giving the illusion of rolling over you're the back across a barrel. At its highest point both legs are airborne and the trunk of the body hovers in the air.
Battement	A throwing, or kick, of the leg fwd., side or bk.
Battements en Cloche	A swinging kick of the leg fwds. and bk. which mimics the swinging of a church bell.
Box jump	Also known as a Russian Jump. The dancer jumps into the air and separates the legs out to the side, in second position, the arms usually extend to the side and the feet are lifted to almost touch the hands.
Box Step	A sequence of four steps that 'box' around each other. R ft. steps fwd., L. ft. across R. ft., R ft. steps to the side, L ft. steps back in place
Cabrioles	The dancer jumps one foot in the air and beats the other leg towards it.
Cartwheels	The dancer puts one hand down on the floor in succession as the body is lifted over the hands, legs are extended straight up in the air with the body straight.
Chaîné Turns	A series of continuous turns on the balls of the feet.
Charleston	A 1920s dance form that sees the feet passing in front of each other whilst twisting on the balls of the feet and keeping the knees in close contact.

Cramp Rolls	A movement (sometimes known as drumbeats) that mimics the rolling action of a drum roll combining steps and heel beats. The sounds are often clustered to a sixteenth-note rhythm (&&a1). A press cramp roll is 3 sounds executed by a step heel of the working leg and a heel beat on the supporting leg, done at speed little movement can be seen.
Développé	An extension of the leg away from the body, either fwds., sideways or bk.
Diminuendo	Where the sound of the music (or tap beats) decreases in volume
Do-Si-Do	A step used in square dances, similar to a polka like movement, with 3 little steps taken forwards, sideways or backwards.
En Pointe	The ability of a ballet dancer, in a blocked shoe, to dance on the tip of the toes. Demi-pointe refers to dancing on the highest lift of the foot whilst the ball of the foot remains in contact with the floor.
Essence	A soft shoe step that had an easy bounce. One foot will brush across the other, then repeat over the other foot, then a continuous brushing across and out.
Forward Walkovers	A hand stand that continues fwd. onto the feet to recover standing.
Fouetté Turns	A turn on one leg whilst the other leg 'whips' in to give momentum.
Grapevine	A series of steps that travels from one side of the stage to another with the feet alternating between crossing in ft. and bd.
Heel Beats	Commences with lifting the heel whilst the toe is in contact with the floor and dropping it down. Heel beats create the bass, or heavier, sounds in tap dancing.
Heel Scuffs	A fwd. brush of the foot catching the heel on the floor
Hitch Kick	A small extension of the leg, followed by a spring onto the opposite leg resulting in a high kick.
Illusion	A titled arabesque line with the body towards the floor given the illusion of a 360-degree turn whilst the leg is extended high in the air.
Jeté	A jump taken off one-foot landing on the other. A grand jeté is a higher leap in which both legs may be fully extended.
Jive	A 6 count sequence that consists of step touches and often done in partners.
Knee Drop	With the feet in parallel, the dancer hinges their weight back and lowers both knees towards the floor, the level of the hinge depends on the counter-balance of the weight.
Knee Spin	The dancer will commence on one knee and bring both together to spin and make a complete turn.
Legato	A smooth and flowing piece of music that has no breaks or silences between each note
Maxi-Ford	A step devised in vaudeville by dancer Max Ford. It has a scissor like action that leaps from side to side with a shuffle action.
Outward Round Kick	A circular kick of the leg that starts across the body and circles in ft., the highest point as it reaches the side before lowering.
Over the Tops	A flash step that consists of extending one leg sideways across the body and jumping alternately fwds. And bk. over it.
Paddle	Also known as a paddle and roll. The paddle refers to the stroking of the action catching the heel and toe, the roll refers to step and heel beat that follows. Usually done in quick succession on alternate feet.
Pas de bourrée	A series of small steps in any direction (typically 3 steps) that require neat and precise footwork.
Petit Jeté en tournant	A small spring from foot to foot that turns.
Pirouette	A turning action on one leg. En dehors is an outward turn and en dedans is turning inside towards the supporting leg.

	An open pirouette refers to turning whilst one leg is extended in the air.
Plié	The bending of the legs from the knees, a *grand* movement results in the bending of the legs going towards the floor, a *demi* movement is only half the depth and sees a slight bend in the knees.
Port de Bras	The carriage of the arms through a prescribed series of shapes defined in ballet technique
Posé turns	A turning action commencing by a small rond de jambe action of the leg outwards and stepping up onto the demi-pointe to turn inwardly.
Pullbacks	A 4 sound step that elevates and travels backwards whilst catching the toe plates before landing.
Relevé à la seconde	The feet shoot out sideways onto the demi pointe and close again. A relevé on one leg is a pulled up action of the leg ending on the toes (demi-point) with the toes remaining in contact with the foor.
Promenade	A dancer stands on one leg and is manoeuvred around in a circle by a partner.
Rond de jambe	A circling action of the working leg which may be outwards (en dehors) or inward (en dedans). A Grand rond de jambe is a sustained circling action of the leg that traces a 360-degree shape in the air.
Scissor Step	The feet cross in front of each other before spring out to the side which is then repeated alternately.
Separated wings	A 3 beat step brush of the feet sideways. To separate the step is executed on both feet simultaneously with a slight delay between each action.
Shim Sham	A 32 bar chorus dance that was based on repetitive sections of movement consisting of a 6 bar phrase followed with a 2 bar break.
Shuffle	A 2 count step in which the toe tap makes a small brush fwd. and bk. using the ankle joint. A 3 count version catches the heel in between the two movements.
Shuffle hop step	A 4-count step based on a simple Irish Jig step. The shuffle passes to the bk. as you hop.
Shunts	With the foot in contact with floor the weight is pushed fwd. and the heel strikes a beat into the floor.
Sissonne fermée	A jump from two feet with a scissor like action on landing on to both feet.
Soft Shoe/Break	A style of tap dance that did not have metal taps fitted to the sole of the shoe. Traditionally, sand would be scattered over the floor to create a more prominent sound as the feet moved in the space. The break is 1 or 2 bar phrase that changes the rhythm of the step to signal its completion or the end of a phrase.
Somersault	A throwing of the body, making 1 or more revolutions in the air, before landing on the feet.
Step ball change	A travelling step that consists of 3 movements, a step forward followed by a transference of weight from foot to foot that can travel of remain on the stop. The legs are in a plié throughout.
Susie Q	The R ft. stamps across the L ft. and is inverted, step to the side on L ft. Whilst twisting on the heel of the R ft.
Tacet	Where there is a silent break in the music/accompaniment.
Tap Step Heel	A 3 sound step that usually travels forward.
Time Steps	An 8-count sequence of tap steps, usually comm. on the count of 8. The rhythm is repetitive and is usually executed 3 times with a 1 bar break to change the rhythm of 6 times with a 2 bar break to change the rhythm.
Toe Beats	The foot is lifted behind and strikes the floor on the top of the toe.

Toe dancing	A dancer in pointe shoes with a metal tap placed on the block of the toe executes tap dance steps.
Train Step	A series of steps and stamps that mimic the rhythmic drive of a train. It can travel or be remain on the spot.
Trench	A sliding step; the body leans forward from the waist, the feet give the illusion that they are sliding backwards alternately.
Wings	A flying step in which the dancer, once airborne, executes a scrape, inward tap and landing during the elevation. It can be executed on both feet simultaneously or on 1 foot at a time. Often known as a 'flash' step due to its technical difficulty.

Appendix 2: Chronological Listing of MGM Musicals from 1927 to 1959

Year	Title	Stars	Producer	Director	Choreographer	Sub-Genre
1929	*The Broadway Melody*	Bessie Love Charles Anita Page	Harry Rapf/Irving Thalberg/Lawrence Weingarten	Roy Del Ruth	George Cunningham/ Sammy Lee (uncredited)	Backstage
	Hallelujah	Nina Mae McKinney Daniel L. Haynes	King Vidor	King Vidor	None listed	Operetta
	Marianne	Marion Davies George Baxter	Marion Davies/Robert Z. Leonard	Robert Z. Leonard	None listed	Operetta
	So This is College	Elliott Nugent Robert Montgomery	Sam Wood	Sam Wood	None listed	Americana
	The Hollywood Revue of 1929	Joan Crawford Bessie Love	Harry Rapf/Irving Thalberg	Charles Reisner	George Cunningham/Sammy Lee	Revue
	It's a Great Life	The Duncan Sisters Lawrence Gray	Not listed	Sam Wood	Sammy Lee	Backstage
	Devil May Care	Roman Novarro Dorothy Jordan	Not listed	Sidney Franklin	Albertina Rasch	Operetta
1930	*Chasing Rainbows*	Bessie Love Charles King	Not listed	Charles Reisner	Sammy Lee	Backstage
	Lord Byron of Broadway	Charles Kaley Ethelind Terry	Not listed	Harry Beaumont/William Nigh	Sammy Lee/Albertina Rasch	Backstage
	Montana Moon	Joan Crawford Johnny Mack Brown	Malcolm St. Clair	Malcolm St. Clair	None listed	Americana
	Free and Easy	Buster Keaton Anita Page	Buster Keaton/Edward Sedgwick	Edward Sedgewick	Sammy Lee	Backstage
	Children of Pleasure	Lawrence Gray Judith Wood	Not listed	Harry Beaumont	Sammy Lee	Operetta
	The Rogue Song	Larence Tibbett Catherine Dale Owen	Paul Bern/Irving Thalberg	Lionel Barrymoore	Albertina Rasch	Operetta

	In Gay Madrid	Roman Novarro Dorothy Jordan	Robert Z. Leonard	Robert Z. Leonard	None listed	Operetta
	They Learned about Women	Joe Schenck Bessie Love	Not listed	Jack Conway/Sam Wood	Sammy Lee	Backstage
	The Florodora Girl	Marion Davies Lawrence Gray	Marion Davies	Harry Beaumont	None listed	Backstage
	Call of the Flesh	Roman Novarro Dorothy Jordan	None listed	Charles Brabin	Eduardo Cansino	Operetta
	Good News	Bessie Love Mary Lawlor	None listed	Nick Grinde	Sammy Lee	Americana
	Love in the Rough	Robert Montgomery Dorothy Jordan	None listed	Charles Reisner	Sammy Lee	Americana
	Madam Satan	Kay Johnson Lillian Roth	Cecil B. DeMille	Cecil B. DeMille	Le Roy Prinz	Americana
	A Lady's Morals	Grace Moore Wallace Beery	Irving Thalberg	Sidney Franklin	Sammy Lee	Biopic
	New Moon	Lawrence Tibbett Grace Moore	None listed	Jack Conway	None listed	Operetta
1931	*The Prodigal*	Lawrence Tibbett Esther Ralston	Paul Verb	Harry A. Pollard	None listed	Operetta
	Flying High	Bert Lahr Charlotte Greenwood	George White	Charles Reisner	Busby Berkeley	Backstage
	Cuban Love Song	Lawrence Tibbett Lupe Velez	Albert Lewin	W.S. Van Dyke	None listed	Operetta
1932	*Blondie of the Follies*	Marion Davies Robert Montgomery	Marion Davies	Edmund Goulding	None listed	Backstage
1933	*Broadway to Hollywood*	Alice Brady Mickey Rooney	Harry Rapf	Willard Mack	Sammy Lee/Albertina Rasch	Backstage
	Dancing Lady	Joan Crawford Fred Astaire	John W. Considine Jnr./David O. Selznick	Robert Z. Leonard	Sammy Lee	Backstage
	Going Hollywood	Marion Davies Bing Crosby	Walter Wagner	Raoul Walsh	Albertina Rasch	Backstage
1934	*The Cat and the Fiddle*	Roman Navorro Jeanette MacDonald	Bernard H. Hyman	William K. Howard	None listed	Operetta

	Hollywood Party	Stan Laurel/Oliver Hardy	Louis Lewyn/Harry Rapf	Charles Reisner	Seymour Felix/Dave Gould/George Hale/Carlos Romero	Backstage
	Student Tour	Jimmy Durante Charles Butterworth	Monta Bell	Charles Reisner	Chester Hale	Americana
	The Merry Widow	Jeanette MacDonald Maurice Chevalier	Ernst Lubitsch Irving Thalberg	Ernst Lubitsch	Albertina Rasch	Operetta
	Babes in Toyland	Stan Lauren Oliver Hardy	Hal Roach	Gus Meins/Charles Rogers	None listed	Operetta
1935	*The Night is Young*	Roman Novarro Evelyn Laye	Harry Rapf	Dudley Murphy	Chester Hale	Operetta
	Naughty Marietta	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy	Hunt Stromberg	Robert Z. Leonard W.S. Van Dyke	Chester Hale	Operetta
	Reckless	Jean Harlow William Powell	David O. Selznick	Victor Fleming	Chester Hale/Carl Randall	Backstage
	Broadway Melody of 1936	Eleanor Powell Buddy & Vilma Ebsen	John W. Considine Jr.	Roy Del Ruth	Dave Gould/Albertina Rasch	Backstage
	Here Comes the Band	Ted Lewis Virginia Bruce	Lucien Hubbard	Paul Sloane	Chester Hale	Backstage
1936	*Rose-Marie*	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy	Hunt Stromberg	W.S. Van Dyke	Chester Hale	Operetta
	The Bohemian Girl	Stan Laurel Oliver Hardy	Hal Roach	James W. Horne/Charles Rogers	None listed	Operetta
	The Great Ziegfeld	William Powell Luise Rainer Ray Bolger	Hunt Stromberg	Robert Z. Leonard	Seymour Felix	Backstage/Bio pic
	San Francisco	Jeanette MacDonald Clark Gable	John Emerson/Bernard H. Hyman	W.S. Van Dyke	Val Raset	Americana/Operetta
	Born to Dance	Eleanor Powell Buddy Ebsen	Jack Cummings	Roy Del Ruth	Dave Gould	Backstage/Dance
1937	*Maytime*	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy	Robert Z. Leonard/Hunt Stromberg	Robert Z. Leonard	Val Raset	Operetta
	Nobody's Baby	Patsy Kelly Lyda Roberti	Hal Roach	Gus Meins	Roy Randolph	Backstage
	Broadway Melody of 1938	Eleanor Powell Buddy Ebsen	Jack Cummings	Roy Del Ruth	Dave Gould	Backstage/Dance

		Judy Garland				
	The Firefly	Jeanette MacDonald Allan Jones	Hunt Stromberg	Robert Z. Leonard	Albertina Rasch	Operetta
	Rosalie	Eleanor Powell Ray Bolger	William Anthony McGuire	W.S. Van Dyke	Albertina Rasch/Dave Gould (uncredited)	Operetta/Dance
1938	*Everybody Sing*	Fanny Brice Judy Garland	Harry Rapf	Edward L. Marin	Dave Gould	Backstage
	Girl of the Golden West	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy	William Anthony McGuire	Robert Z. Leonard	Albertina Rasch	Operetta
	Listen, Darling!	Judy Garland Freddie Bartholomew	Jack Cummings	Edwin L. Marin	None listed	Americana
	The Great Waltz	Luise Rainer	Bernard H. Hyman	Julien Duvivier	Albertina Rasch	Operetta
	Sweethearts	Jeanette MacDonald Ray Bolger	Hunt Stromberg	W.S. Van Dyke	Albertina Rasch/Ernst Matray	Operetta
	Let Freedom Ring	Nelson Eddy Virginia Bruce	Harry Rapf	Jack Conway	None listed	Operetta
	Thoroughbreds Don't Cry	Judy Garland Mickey Rooney	Harry Rapf	Alfred E. Green	None listed	Americana
1939	*Honolulu*	Eleanor Powell	Jack Cummings	Edward Buzzell	Bobby Connolly/Sammy Lee	Dance
	Ice Follies of 1939	Joan Crawford	Harry Rapf	Reinhold Schünzel	Frances Claudet/Val Raset	Backstage
	Broadway Serenade	Jeanette MacDonald	Robert Z. Leonard	Robert Z. Leonard	Seymour Felix	Backstage
	The Wizard of Oz	Judy Garland	Mervyn LeRoy	Victor Fleming/King Vidor	Bobby Connolly	Fantasy
	Babes in Arms	Mickey Rooney Judy Garland	Arthur Freed	Busby Berkeley	Busby Berkeley	Backstage
	Balalaika	Illona Massey Nelson Eddy	Lawrence Weingarten	Reinhold Schünzel	Ernst Matray/Albertina Rasch	Operetta
1940	*Two Girls on Broadway*	Lana Turner George Murphy	Jack Cummings	S. Sylvan Simon	Bobby Connolly/Eddie Larkin	Backstage
	Broadway Melody of 1940	Eleanor Powell Fred Astaire George Murphy	Jack Cummings	Norman Taurog	Bobby Connolly/Albertina Rasch (uncredited)	Backstage/Dance
	New Moon	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy	Robert Z. Leonard	Robert Z. Leonard	Val Raset	Operetta

	Strike up the Band	Mickey Rooney Judy Garland	Arthur Freed	Busby Berkeley	Busby Berkeley	Backstage
	Little Nellie Kelly	Judy Garland George Murphy	Arthur Freed	Norman Taurog	Eddie Larkin	Americana
	Bitter Sweet	Jeanette MacDonald	Victor Saville	W.S. Van Dyke	Ernst Matray	Operetta
	Hullabaloo	Dan Dailey Frank Morgan	Louis K. Sidney	Edwin L. Marin	Sammy Lee	Backstage
1941	*Ziegfeld Girl*	Judy Garland	Pandro S. Berman	Robert Z. Leonard	Busby Berkeley/Daniel Dare (uncredited)	Backstage
	Lady, Be Good	Eleanor Powell	Arthur Freed	Norman Z. McLeod	Busby Berkeley	Backstage
	The Chocolate Soldier	Nelson Eddy Risë Stevens	Victor Saville	Roy Del Ruth	Ernst Matray	Operetta
1942	*Babes on Broadway*	Judy Garland Mickey Rooney	Arthur Freed	Busby Berkeley	Busby Berkeley	Backstage
	Ship Ahoy	Eleanor Powell	Jack Cummings	Edward Buzzell	Bobby Connolly	Dance
	Cairo	Jeanette MacDonald	Joseph L. Mankiewicz	W.S. Van Dyke	Sammy Lee	Americana
	I Married an Angel	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy	Hunt Stromberg	W.S. Van Dyke	Ernst Matray	Operetta
	Born to Sing	Virgina Weidler Ray McDonald	Frederick Stephani	Edward Ludwig	Sammy Lee/Busby Berkeley	Americana
	Rio Rita	Kathryn Grayson Bud Abbott Lou Costello	Pandro S. Berman	S. Sylvan Simon	David Robel (uncredited)	Operetta
	Panama Hattie	Ann Sothern	Arthur Freed	Norman Z. McLeod	Daniel Dare	
	Seven Sweethearts	Kathryn Grayson	Frank Borzage/Joe Pasternak	Frank Brozage	Ernst Matray	Operetta
	For Me and My Gal	Judy Garland Gene Kelly	Arthur Freed	Busby Berkeley	Bobby Connolly	Backstage/Americana
1943	*Presenting Lily Mars*	Judy Garland	Joe Pasternak	Norman Taurog	Ernst Matray/Charles Walters (uncredited)	Backstage
	Dubarry was a Lady	Gene Kelly Lucille Ball	Arthur Freed	Roy Del Ruth	Charles Walters	Backstage
	Cabin in the Sky	Lena Horne Eddie 'Rochester' Anderson Ethel Waters	Arthur Freed	Vincente Minnelli	None listed	Americana

	Thousands Cheer	Gene Kelly Eleanor Powell	Joe Pasternak	George Sidney	Gene Kelly	Revue/Americana
	I Dood It!	Eleanor Powell	Jack Cummings	Vincente Minnelli	Bobby Connolly	
	Best Foot Forward	Lucille Ball June Allyson Gloria DeHaven	Arthur Freed	Edward Buzzell	Charles Walters/Jack Donahue (uncredited)	Backstage
	Girl Crazy	Mickey Rooney Judy Garland June Allyson	Arthur Freed	Norman Taurog	Busby Berkeley	Backstage
1944	*Swing Fever*	Kay Kyser Marilyn Maxwell Lena Horne	Irving Starr	Tim Whelan	Ernst & Maria Matray	Dance
	Meet the People	Lucille Ball Dick Powell June Allyson	E.Y. Harburg	Charles Reisner	Jack Donahue/Sammy Lee/Charles Walters	Americana
	Two Girls and a Sailor	June Allyson Gloria DeHaven	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorpe	Sammy Lee	Americana
	Broadway Rhythm	Gloria DeHaven Lena Horne	Jack Cummings	Roy Del Ruth	Robert Alton/Jack Donahue/Don Loper/Charles Walters	Revue/Backstage
	Bathing Beauty	Esther Williams	Jack Cummings	George Sidney	Robert Alton/John Murray Anderson	Dance
	Meet Me in St. Louis	Judy Garland Lucille Bremer	Arthur Freed	Vincente Minnelli	Charles Walters	Americana
	Music for Millions	June Allyson Margaret O'Brien	Joe Pasternak	Henry Koster	Jack Donahue (uncredited)	Americana
1945	*Thrill of a Romance*	Esther Williams	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorpe	Charles Walters	Dance
	Anchors Aweigh	Gene Kelly Frank Sinatra	Joe Pasternak	George Sidney	Gene Kelly	Americana
	Yolanda and the Thief	Fred Astaire Lucille Bremer	Arthur Freed	Vincente Minnelli	Eugene Loring	Integrated/Dance
1946	*The Harvey Girls*	Judy Garland Angela Lansbury Cyd Charisse	Arthur Freed	George Sidney	Robert Alton	Americana
	Ziegfeld Follies	Fred Astaire Gene Kelly	Arthur Freed	Lemuel Ayres/Roy Del Ruth/Robert	Robert Alton/Charles Walters/Eugene Loring	Revue

		Cyd Charisse		Lewis/Vincente Minnelli/George Sidney/Merrill Pye/Charles Walters		
	Two Sisters from Boston	June Allyson Kathryn Grayson	Joe Pasternak	Henry Koster	Jack Donahue	Americana
	Easy to Wed	Esther Williams Lucille Ball	Jack Cummings	Edward Buzzell	Jack Donahue	Americana
	Holiday in Mexico	Jane Powell	Joe Pasternak	George Sidney	Stanley Donen	Americana
	No Leave, No Love	Van Johnson Keenan Wynn	Joe Pasternak	Charles Martin	Stanley Donen	Americana
	Till the Clouds Roll By	June Allyson Ann Sothern Angela Lansbury	Arthur Freed	Richard Whorf	Robert Alton	Biopic
1947	*It Happened in Brooklyn*	Frank Sinatra Kathryn Grayson	Jack Cummings	Richard Whorf	Jack Donahue	Americana
	Fiesta	Esther Williams Cyd Charisse	Jack Cummings	Richard Thorpe	Eugene Loring	Americana/Dance
	The Unfinished Dance	Cyd Charisse Margaret O'Brien	Joe Pasternak	Henry Koster	David Lichine	Dance
	This Time for Keeps	Esther Williams	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorpe	Stanley Donen	
	Living in a Big Way		Pandro S. Berman	Gregory La Cava	Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen	Americana
	Good News	June Allyson Ray McDonald Joan McCracken	Arthur Freed	Charles Walters	Robert Alton	Americana
1948	*Three Daring Daughters*	Jane Powell Jeanette MacDonald	Joe Pasternak	Fred M. Wilcox	None credited	Americana
	Big City	Margaret O'Brien	Joe Pasternak	Norman Taurog	Stanley Donen	
	Summer Holiday	Mickey Rooney Gloria DeHaven	Arthur Freed	Rouben Mamoulin	Charles Walters	Americana
	On an Island with You	Esther Williams	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorpe	Jack Donahue	Dance
	The Pirate	Gene Kelly Judy Garland	Arthur Freed	Vincente Minnelli	Robert Alton/Gene Kelly	Integrated
	A Date with Judy	Jane Powell	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorpe	Stanley Donen	Americana

		Elizabeth Taylor				
	Easter Parade	Fred Astaire Judy Garland Ann Miller	Arthur Freed	Charles Walters	Robert Alton	Backstage/Catalogue
	Luxury Liner	Jane Powell	Joe Pasternak	Richard Whorf	Nick Castle	Americana
	The Kissing Bandit	Kathryn Grayson Frank Sinatra Ann Miller Cyd Charisse	Joe Pasternak	Laslo Benedek	Stanley Donen/Robert Alton (uncredited)	Americana
	Words and Music	Mickey Rooney Tom Drake Judy Garland Gene Kelly	Arthur Freed	Norman Taurog	Robert Alton	Catalogue
1949	*Take Me Out to the Ballgame*	Gene Kelly Frank Sinatra Esther Williams	Arthur Freed	Busby Berkeley	Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen	Americana
	The Barkleys of Broadway	Fred Astaire Ginger Rogers	Arthur Freed	Charles Walters	Robert Alton	Backstage
	Neptune's Daughter	Esther Williams Betty Garrett	Jack Cummings	Edward Buzzell	Jack Donahue	Dance
	In the Good Old Summertime	Judy Garland Van Johnson	Joe Pasternak	Robert Z. Leonard	Robert Alton	Americana
	That Midnight Kiss	Kathryn Grayson Mario Lanza	Joe Pasternak	Norman Taurog	None listed	Operetta
	On the Town	Gene Kelly Frank Sinatra Vera Ellen Ann Miller	Arthur Freed	Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen	Gene Kelly	Integrated/Dance
1950	*Annie Get Your Gun*	Betty Hutton Howard Keel	Arthur Freed	George Sidney/Busby Berkeley (uncredited)	Robert Alton	Integrated
	Three Little Words	Fred Astaire Vera-Ellen	Jack Cummings	Richard Thorpe	Hermes Pan/Fred Astaire	Biopic/Dance
	The Duchess of Idaho	Esther Williams Eleanor Powell	Joe Pasternak	Robert Z. Leonard	Jack Donohue	Dance
	Nancy Goes to Rio	Jane Powell Ann Sothern	Joe Pasternak	Robert Z. Leonard	Nick Castle	Americana

	The Toast of New Orleans	Mario Lanza Kathryn Grayson	Joe Pasternak	Norman Taurog	Eugene Loring	Operetta
	Summer Stock	Gene Kelly Judy Garland	Joe Pasternak	Charles Walters	Nick Castle/Gene Kelly	Backstage
	Two Weeks with Love	Jane Powell Debbie Reynolds	Jack Cummings	Roy Rowland	Busby Berkeley	Americana
	Pagan Love Song	Esther Williams	Arthur Freed	Robert Alton	None listed	Americana
1951	*Royal Wedding*	Fred Astaire Jane Powell	Arthur Freed	Stanley Donen	Nick Castle	Backstage
	The Great Caruso	Mario Lanza	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorper	Peter Herman Adler	Operetta
	Show Boat	Kathryn Grayson Howard Keel Ava Gardner	Arthur Freed	George Sidney	Robert Alton	Integrated/Operetta
	Rich, Young and Pretty	Jane Powell	Joe Pasternak	Norman Taurog	Nick Castle	Americana
	Excuse My Dust	Red Skelton Sally Forrest	Jack Cummings	Roy Rowland	Hermes Pan	Americana
	The Strip	Mickey Rooney	Joe Pasternak	Làszló Kardos	Nick Castle	Americana
	An American in Paris	Gene Kelly Leslie Caron	Arthur Freed	Vincente Minnelli	Gene Kelly	Integrated/Catalogue
	Texas Carnival	Esther Williams Ann Miller	Jack Cummings	Charles Walters	Hermes Pan	Dance
	Mr. Imperium	Lana Turner	Edwin H. Knopf	Don Hartman	None listed	Americana
1952	*The Belle of New York*	Fred Astaire Vera-Ellen	Arthur Freed	Charles Walters	Robert Alton	Americana/Dance
	Singin' in the Rain	Gene Kelly Donald O'Connor Debbie Reynolds	Arthur Freed	Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen	Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen	Backstage/Catalogue
	Skirts Ahoy!	Esther Williams Vivian Blaine	Joe Pasternak	Sidney Lanfield	Nick Castle	Americana/Dance
	The Merry Widow	Lana Turner Fernando Lamas	Joe Pasternak	Curtis Bernhardt	Jack Cole	Operetta
	Lovely to Look At	Howard Keel Kathryn Grayson Ann Miller Marge & Gower Champion	Jack Cummings	Mervyn Le Roy	Hermes Pan	Backstage/Integrated

	Because You're Mine	Mario Lanza Doretta Morrow	Joe Pasternak	Alexander Hall		Operetta
	Everything I Have is Yours	Marge & Gower Champion	George Wells	Robert Z. Leonard	Nick Castle/Gower Champion	Dance
	Million Dollar Mermaid	Esther Williams	Arthur Hornblow Jnr.	Mervyn LeRoy	Busby Berkeley/Audrene Brier	Dance
1953	*I Love Melvin*	Donald O'Connor Debbie Reynolds	George Wells	Don Wells	Robert Alton	Dance
	Dangerous When Wet	Esther Williams	George Wells	Charles Walters	Charles Walters/Billy Daniel	Dance
	Small Town Girl	Jane Powell Ann Miller Bobby Van	Joe Pasternak	Làszló Kardos	Busby Berkeley	Backstage
	The Band Wagon	Fred Astaire Cyd Charisse	Arthur Freed	Vincente Minnelli	Michael Kidd	Backstage/Catalogue
	Lili	Leslie Caron Mel Ferrer	Edward Knopf	Charles Walters	Charles Walters/Jack Cole	Backstage/Integrated
	Torch Song	Joan Crawford	Henry Berman Sidney Franklin Jr. Charles Schnee	Charles Walters	Charles Walters	Backstage
	Kiss me, Kate	Kathryn Grayson Howard Keel Ann Miller Tommy Rall	Jack Cummings	George Sidney	Hermes Pan/Bob Fosse	Backstage/Integrated
	The Affairs of Dobie Gillis	Bob Fosse Debbie Reynolds Bobby Van	Arthur M. Loew	Don Weis	Alex Romero	Americana
	Give a Girl a Break	Bob Fosse Debbie Reynolds Marge & Gower Champion	Jack Cummings	Stanley Donen	Stanley Donen/Gower Champion	Backstage
	Easy to Love	Esther Williams Van Johnson	Joe Pasternak	Charles Walters	Busby Berkeley	Dance
1954	*Rose Marie*	Howard Keel Ann Blyth	Mervyn LeRoy	Mervyn LeRoy	Busby Berkeley	Operetta

	Seven Brides for Seven Brothers	Jane Powell Tommy Rall Russ Tamblyn Matt Mattox Jacques D'Amboise	Jack Cummings	Stanley Donen	Michael Kidd	Americana/Integrated
	The Student Prince	Ann Blyth Edmund Purdom	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorpe	Hermes Pan	Operetta
	Brigadoon	Gene Kelly Cyd Charisse	Arthur Freed	Vicente Minnelli	Gene Kelly	Integrated
	Athena	Debbie Reynolds Jane Powell	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorpe	Valerie Bettis	
	Deep in My Heart	Ann Miller Cyd Charisse Gene & Fred Kelly	Roger Edens	Stanley Donen	Eugene Loring	Biopic
1955	*Jupiter's Darling*	Esther Williams Marge & Gower Champion	George Wells	George Sidney	Hermes Pan	Dance
	Hit the Deck	Ann Miller Russ Tamblyn Debbie Reynolds	Joe Pasternak	Roy Rowland	Hermes Pan	Dance/Americana
	Interrupted Melody	Eleanor Parker Glenn Ford	Jack Cummings	Curtis Bernhardt	Vladimir Rosing	Biopic
	Love Me or Leave Me	Doris Day James Cagney	Joe Pasternak	Charles Vidor	Alex Romero	Biopic
	It's Always Fair Weather	Gene Kelly Michael Kidd Dan Dailey Cyd Charisse	Arthur Freed	Gene Kelly/Stanley Donen	Gene Kelly/Stanley Donen	Integrated/Dance
	The Glass Slipper	Leslie Caron Michael Wilding	Edwin H. Knopf	Charles Walters	Roland Petit	Dance
	Kismet	Howard Keel Ann Blyth	Arthur Freed	Vincente Minnelli	Jack Cole	Integrated/Operetta
	I'll Cry Tomorrow	Susan Hayward Richard Conte	Lawrence Weingarten	Daniel Mann	None listed	Biopic
1956	*Meet Me in Las Vegas*	Cyd Charisse Dan Dailey	Joe Pasternak	Roy Rowland	Hermes Pan/Eugene Loring	Dance

	Invitation to the Dance	Gene Kelly	Arthur Freed	Gene Kelly	Gene Kelly	Dance
	High Society	Frank Sinatra Bing Crosby	Sol C. Siegel	Charles Walters	Charles Walters	Integrated
	The Opposite Sex	June Allyson Ann Miller	Joe Pasternak	David Miller	Robert Sidney	Integrated
1957	*Ten Thousand Bedrooms*	Dean Martin Anna Maria Alberghetti	Joe Pasternak	Richard Thorpe	None listed	Integrated
	This Could Be the Night	Jean Simmons Paul Douglas	Joe Pasternak	Robert Wise	Jack Baker	Backstage
	Silk Stockings	Fred Astaire Cyd Charisse	Arthur Freed	Rouben Mamoulin	Hermes Pan Eugene Loring	Integrated
	Les Girls	Gene Kelly Mitzi Gaynor	Sol C. Siegel Saul Chaplin	George Cukor	Jack Cole	Backstage
1958	*Seven Hills of Rome*	Mario Lanza Renato Rascel	Silvio	Roy Rowland	Paul Steffen	Operetta
	Merry Andrew	Danny Kaye Pier Angeli	Sol C. Siegel Saul Chaplin	Michael Kidd	Michael Kidd	Integrated
	Gigi	Leslie Caron Maurice Chevalier	Arthur Freed	Vincente Minnelli	Charles Walters (uncredited)	Integrated
	Tom Thumb	Russ Tamblyn	Dora Wright George Pal	George Pal	Alex Romero	Fantasy
1959	*For the First Time*	Mario Lanza Johanna von Koczian	Alexander Grüter	Rudolph Maté	None listed	Operetta

Appendix 3: ETHICS

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference DAN 13/013 in the Department of Dance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 28th October 2013.

University of Roehampton London

ETHICS COMMITTEE

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Re-Imagining the MGM Musical: Authorship and Adaptation in Film and Stage musicals

Brief Description of Research Project:

To investigate and research the role of dance in musical film and its influence and development in musical theatre from the 1990's to present date. The interview will be approximately 1 hour in length and will be recorded. The findings will be published in a PhD Thesis to be submitted to the University of Roehampton.

Investigator Contact Details:

Nathan James
Dance Department of Dance
University of Roehampton,
Froebel College, Roehampton Lane,
London, SW15 5PJ
Email: jamesn1@roehampton.ac.uk Telephone: +44 7939 226955

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

If you wish your comments and identity to remain anonymous please tick: ☐

Name ……

Signature …… Date ……

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies).

Director of Studies Contact Details:
Dr. Stacey Prickett
Research Degrees Convener,
Department of Dance
University of Roehampton,
Froebel College, Roehampton Lane
London, SW15 5PJ
Email: S.Prickett@roehampton.ac.uk

Head of Department Details:
Dr Ann David
Head of Department
Department of Dance
University of Roehampton
Froebel College, Roehampton Lane
London, SW15 5PJ
Email: A.David@roehampton.ac.uk